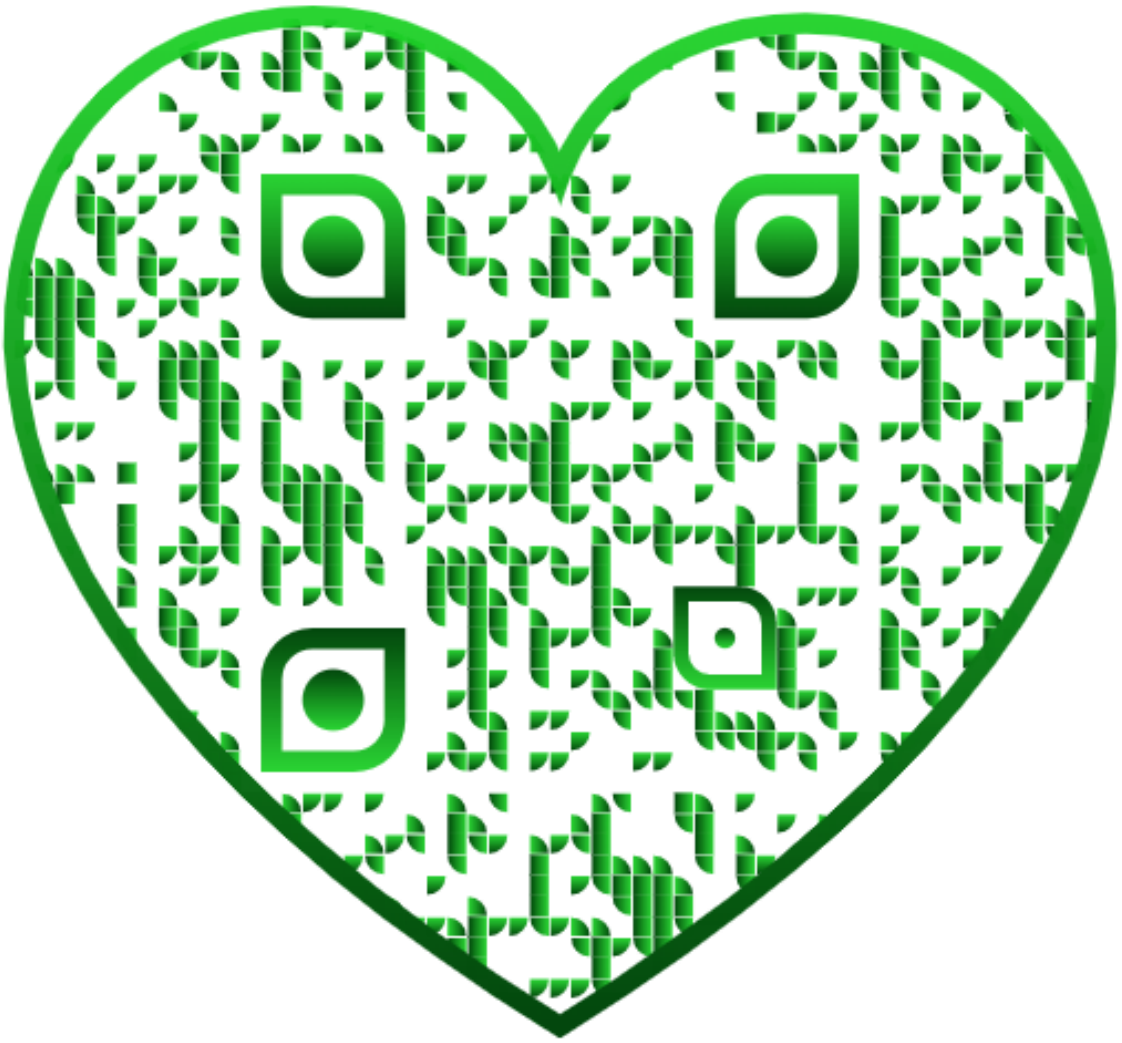
ANCIENT WORLD LEADERS

DARIUS THE GREAT

J. Poolos

Introductory essay by
Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.



DARIUS THE GREAT

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❖ ANCIENT WORLD LEADERS ❖

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❖ ANCIENT WORLD LEADERS ❖

DARIUS THE GREAT

J. Poolos

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Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

On Leadership

Leadership, it may be said, is really what makes the world go round. Love no doubt smoothes the passage; but love is a private transaction between consenting adults. Leadership is a public transaction with history. The idea of leadership affirms the capacity of individuals to move, inspire, and mobilize masses of people so that they act together in pursuit of an end. Sometimes leadership serves good purposes, sometimes bad; but whether the end is benign or evil, great leaders are those men and women who leave their personal stamp on history.

Now, the very concept of leadership implies the proposition that individuals can make a difference. This proposition has never been universally accepted. From classical times to the present day, eminent thinkers have regarded individuals as no more than the agents and pawns of larger forces, whether the gods and goddesses of the ancient world or, in the modern era, race, class, nation, the dialectic, the will of the people, the spirit of the times, history itself. Against such forces, the individual dwindles into insignificance.

So contends the thesis of historical determinism. Tolstoy's great novel *War and Peace* offers a famous statement of the case. Why, Tolstoy asked, did millions of men in the Napoleonic Wars, denying their human feelings and their common sense, move back and forth across Europe slaughtering their fellows? "The war," Tolstoy answered, "was bound to happen simply because

it was bound to happen." All prior history determined it. As for leaders, they, Tolstoy said, "are but the labels that serve to give a name to an end and, like labels, they have the least possible connection with the event." The greater the leader, "the more conspicuous the inevitability and the predestination of every act he commits." The leader, said Tolstoy, is "the slave of history."

Determinism takes many forms. Marxism is the determinism of class. Nazism the determinism of race. But the idea of men and women as the slaves of history runs athwart the deepest human instincts. Rigid determinism abolishes the idea of human freedom—the assumption of free choice that underlies every move we make, every word we speak, every thought we think. It abolishes the idea of human responsibility, since it is manifestly unfair to reward or punish people for actions that are by definition beyond their control. No one can live consistently by any deterministic creed. The Marxist states prove this themselves by their extreme susceptibility to the cult of leadership.

More than that, history refutes the idea that individuals make no difference. In December 1931 a British politician crossing Fifth Avenue in New York City between 76th and 77th Streets around 10:30 p.m. looked in the wrong direction and was knocked down by an automobile— a moment, he later recalled, of a man aghast, a world aglare: "I do not understand why I was not broken like an eggshell or squashed like a gooseberry." Fourteen months later an American politician, sitting in an open car in Miami, Florida, was fired on by an assassin; the man beside him was hit. Those who believe that individuals make no difference to history might well ponder whether the next two decades would have been the same had Mario Constasino's car killed Winston Churchill in 1931 and Giuseppe Zangara's bullet killed Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. Suppose, in addition, that Lenin had died of typhus in Siberia in 1895 and that Hitler had been killed on the western front in 1916. What would the 20th century have looked like now?

For better or for worse, individuals do make a difference. "The notion that a people can run itself and its affairs anonymously,"

wrote the philosopher William James, "is now well known to be the silliest of absurdities. Mankind does nothing save through initiatives on the part of inventors, great or small, and imitation by the rest of us—these are the sole factors in human progress. Individuals of genius show the way, and set the patterns, which common people then adopt and follow."

Leadership, James suggests, means leadership in thought as well as in action. In the long run, leaders in thought may well make the greater difference to the world. "The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong," wrote John Maynard Keynes, "are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. . . . The power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas."

But, as Woodrow Wilson once said, "Those only are leaders of men, in the general eye, who lead in action. . . . It is at their hands that new thought gets its translation into the crude language of deeds." Leaders in thought often invent in solitude and obscurity, leaving to later generations the tasks of imitation. Leaders in action—the leaders portrayed in this series—have to be effective in their own time.

And they cannot be effective by themselves. They must act in response to the rhythms of their age. Their genius must be adapted, in a phrase from William James, "to the receptivities of the moment." Leaders are useless without followers. "There goes the mob," said the French politician, hearing a clamor in the streets. "I am their leader. I must follow them." Great leaders turn the inchoate emotions of the mob to purposes of their own. They seize on the opportunities of their time, the hopes, fears, frustrations, crises, potentialities. They succeed when events have prepared the way for them, when the community is awaiting to be aroused, when they can provide the clarifying and organizing ideas. Leadership completes the circuit between the individual and the mass and thereby alters history.

It may alter history for better or for worse. Leaders have been responsible for the most extravagant follies and most monstrous crimes that have beset suffering humanity. They have also been vital in such gains as humanity has made in individual freedom, religious and racial tolerance, social justice, and respect for human rights.

There is no sure way to tell in advance who is going to lead for good and who for evil. But a glance at the gallery of men and women in Ancient World Leaders suggests some useful tests.

One test is this: Do leaders lead by force or by persuasion? By command or by consent? Through most of history leadership was exercised by the divine right of authority. The duty of followers was to defer and to obey. "Theirs not to reason why/ Theirs but to do and die." On occasion, as with the so-called enlightened despots of the 18th century in Europe, absolutist leadership was animated by humane purposes. More often, absolutism nourished the passion for domination, land, gold, and conquest and resulted in tyranny.

The great revolution of modern times has been the revolution of equality. "Perhaps no form of government," wrote the British historian James Bryce in his study of the United States, *The American Commonwealth*, "needs great leaders so much as democracy." The idea that all people should be equal in their legal condition has undermined the old structure of authority, hierarchy, and deference. The revolution of equality has had two contrary effects on the nature of leadership. For equality, as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in his great study *Democracy in America*, might mean equality in servitude as well as equality in freedom.

"I know of only two methods of establishing equality in the political world," Tocqueville wrote. "Rights must be given to every citizen, or none at all to anyone . . . save one, who is the master of all." There was no middle ground "between the sovereignty of all and the absolute power of one man." In his astonishing prediction of 20th-century totalitarian dictatorship, Tocqueville explained how the revolution of equality

could lead to the *Führerprinzip* and more terrible absolutism than the world had ever known.

But when rights are given to every citizen and the sovereignty of all is established, the problem of leadership takes a new form, becomes more exacting than ever before. It is easy to issue commands and enforce them by the rope and the stake, the concentration camp and the *gulag*. It is much harder to use argument and achievement to overcome opposition and win consent. The Founding Fathers of the United States understood the difficulty. They believed that history had given them the opportunity to decide, as Alexander Hamilton wrote in the first Federalist Paper, whether men are indeed capable of basing government on "reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend . . . on accident and force."

Government by reflection and choice called for a new style of leadership and a new quality of followership. It required leaders to be responsive to popular concerns, and it required followers to be active and informed participants in the process. Democracy does not eliminate emotion from politics; sometimes it fosters demagoguery; but it is confident that, as the greatest of democratic leaders put it, you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. It measures leadership by results and retires those who overreach or falter or fail.

It is true that in the long run despots are measured by results too. But they can postpone the day of judgment, sometimes indefinitely, and in the meantime they can do infinite harm. It is also true that democracy is no guarantee of virtue and intelligence in government, for the voice of the people is not necessarily the voice of God. But democracy, by assuring the right of opposition, offers built-in resistance to the evils inherent in absolutism. As the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr summed it up, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to justice makes democracy necessary."

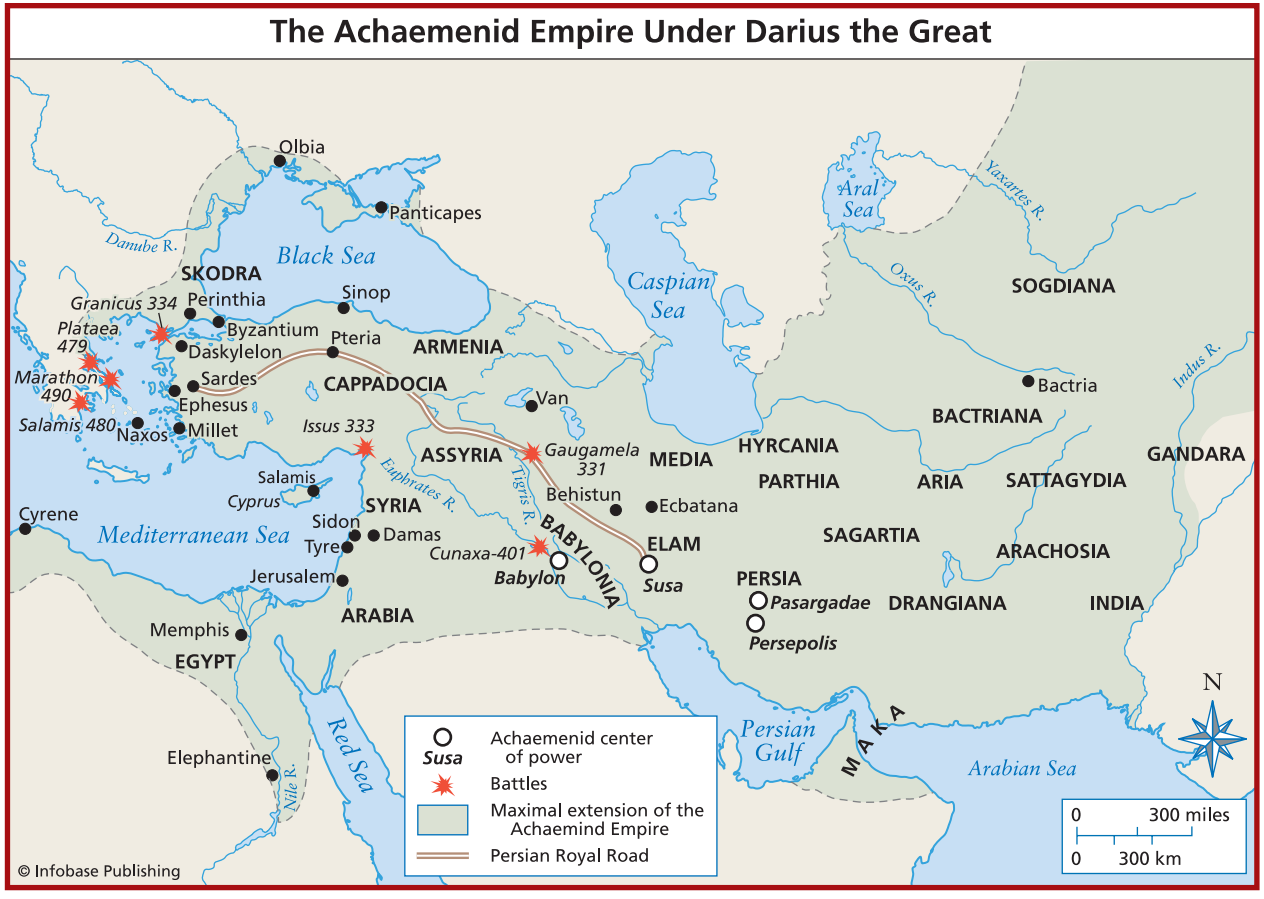
A second test for leadership is the end for which power is sought. When leaders have as their goal the supremacy of a master race or the promotion of totalitarian revolution or the

acquisition and exploitation of colonies or the protection of greed and privilege or the preservation of personal power, it is likely that their leadership will do little to advance the cause of humanity. When their goal is the abolition of slavery, the liberation of women, the enlargement of opportunity for the poor and powerless, the extension of equal rights to racial minorities, the defense of the freedoms of expression and opposition, it is likely that their leadership will increase the sum of human liberty and welfare.

Leaders have done great harm to the world. They have also conferred great benefits. You will find both sorts in this series. Even "good" leaders must be regarded with a certain wariness. Leaders are not demigods; they put on their trousers one leg after another just like ordinary mortals. No leader is infallible, and every leader needs to be reminded of this at regular intervals. Irreverence irritates leaders but is their salvation. Unquestioning submission corrupts leaders and demeans followers. Making a cult of a leader is always a mistake. Fortunately, hero worship generates its own antidote. "Every hero," said Emerson, "becomes a bore at last."

The single benefit the great leaders confer is to embolden the rest of us to live according to our own best selves, to be active, insistent, and resolute in affirming our own sense of things. For great leaders attest to the reality of human freedom against the supposed inevitabilities of history. And they attest to the wisdom and power that may lie within the most unlikely of us, which is why Abraham Lincoln remains the supreme example of great leadership. A great leader, said Emerson, exhibits new possibilities to all humanity. "We feed on genius. . . . Great men exist that there may be greater men."

Great leaders, in short, justify themselves by emancipating and empowering their followers. So humanity struggles to master its destiny, remembering with Alexis de Tocqueville: "It is true that around every man a fatal circle is traced beyond which he cannot pass; but within the wide verge of that circle he is powerful and free; as it is with man, so with communities." ◆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BACTRIANA
Indus R.
GANDARA
HYRCANIA
PARTHIA
ARIA
SATTAGYDIA
SAGARTIA
ARACHOSIA
DRANGIANA
INDIA
N
Achaemenid center of power
Susa
Battles
Maximal extension of the Achaemind Empire
Persian Royal Road
0 300 miles
0 300 km
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CHAPTER

1

The Throne Is Stolen

IT WAS A TERRIBLY HOT EVENING IN SEPTEMBER, WITH A DRY WIND BLOW-ing from the west. The assassin sat in the shadow, his back against a wall, collecting his thoughts while he waited for the sun to set. By then his target, the emperor, would be in his chamber, readying for the dinner his court prepared. As day turned to night and stars began to light the sky, the assassin considered the events that had led to his mission. For in the Persian palace, nothing was as it seemed.

Prior to his death, Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenian Empire, informed the public that he had made the decision who would rule Persia when he died. His family had many branches, so there were several potential heirs to the throne. But

as was expected, he named only his son Cambyses II to rule the land. When Cyrus died in approximately 530 B.C., Cambyses II took the throne without challenge. In 525 B.C., Cambyses II was called to war in Egypt. He publicly named Patizithes as custodian of the royal palace while he was away.

The shrewd Patizithes could not have been more thrilled. He knew that if Cambyses II should fail to return from his campaign in Egypt, the brother of Cambyses II, Smerdis (also called Bardiya), would assume the throne. Patizithes also knew that Cambyses II feared his brother might install himself as emperor in his absence, and that Cambyses II had secretly ordered the assassination of Smerdis. Meanwhile, Cambyses II took Egypt and from there moved to the kingdoms of Napata and Meroe,

Cast

Cyrus the Great: the former king and "founder" of the Achaemenid Empire.
Cambyses II: the king of Persia, son of Cyrus.
Patizithes: named custodian of the royal palace by Cambyses II.
Smerdis: brother of Cambyses II, would assume the throne if Cambyses II was killed.
Gaumata: an imposter who pretended to be Smerdis.
Herodotus: a Greek historian who tells the story.
Otanes: Cambyses II's brother-in-law.
Phaedymia: daughter of Otanes.
Hydarnes, Intaphrenes, Megabyzus: members of the royal family who suspected Gaumata was an imposter.
Darius: Cambyses II's spear bearer.

which are present-day Sudan. This attempt failed, as did his attempt to take Carthage.

While Cambyses II was away, Patizithes devised a plan that would bring him and his family power. Patizithes called upon his own brother Gaumata to pose as Smerdis and assume the throne. In the spring of 522 B.C., Gaumata was successful and became emperor. Immediately, he granted the empire's citizens freedom from paying taxes for a period of three years. This bought him favor among the people.

Gaumata was in the seventh month of his popular rule when Cambyses II turned back to Persia to reclaim his throne. But when he realized he would be unable to defeat Gaumata and his supporters, he took his own life. Other historical accounts say he died during marches through Syrian Ecbatana (now Hamath) or through Damascus, but these are less likely scenarios.

Regardless, Cambyses II wasn't the only one who smelled a rat. According to Herodotus, one of the first Greek historians, Otanes, the brother of Cambyses II's mother, was the first to suspect that Gaumata was an imposter. He had learned from his daughter, Phaedymia, that the man posing as Smerdis was in fact a Magian. He immediately called upon other conspirators to discuss a plan to bring justice to the throne. Among those joining him were Hydarnes, Intaphrenes, and Megabyzus. As they were making plans to retake the throne, Darius, who in battle (as the king's spear bearer) had learned of the death of Cyrus, rushed from Egypt across the desert to join them. He urged them to act at once. In all, seven conspirators would storm the palace that night.

The assassin stood up from his seat against the wall. It was dark. He listened and heard nothing. He took a step into the darkness, his hand feeling along the stone wall, as he made his way to meet the others.

What happened next is not well documented. It is clear the false Smerdis was murdered. How and by whom is recorded

When Cambyses II decided to invade Egypt, the pharaoh began to prepare for war by creating alliances with other leaders and building his armies and navy. However, the pharaoh was betrayed by both the admiral of his navy and his ally, Polycrates, ruler of the island Samos. As a consequence, he lost the war and Cambyses II easily took over Egypt.

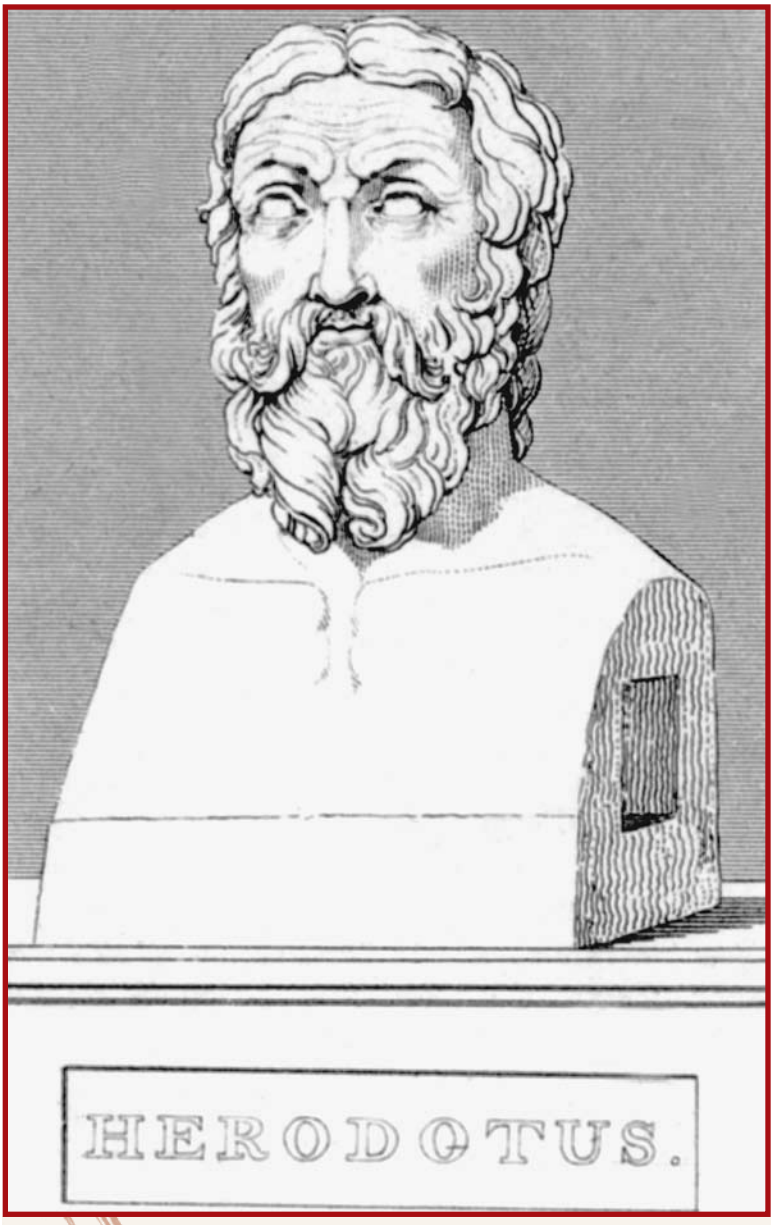
only in the writings of Herodotus. It is not clear exactly who killed Gaumata, but it is known that the victors carried the head of the imposter into the courtyard and told the story of Gaumata's deception. Enraged, the people embraced the assassins, not fully realizing the impact of the event. For a brief moment following the assassination of the false Smerdis, the Achaemenian Empire, which stretched over the area of what is now Iran, was without a leader. The empire, built from scratch by Cyrus, feared by surrounding nations, had had its head cut off.

THE TRICK OF THE HORSE

Several days after the assassination of Gaumata, the imposter, the conspirators gathered outside of the city to discuss their options. For several hours they argued about the best course of action for the empire. A few made the case for the creation of a democracy, in which power was shared by members of a parliament or a cabinet; this seemed like a fair solution. Others felt a monarchy, where a single king ruled, was a more sound choice. According to the histories of Herodotus, Darius made a strong case for monarchical rule, reasoning that democracy was fertile ground for corruption and infighting, and that a strong king would lead an empire with a single-mindedness not possible in other forms of government. Eventually, he convinced the others. But the question remained, who would assume the throne?

Otanes conceded that he had no interest in being king. All agreed that in the event that one of them took the throne, Otanes and his family would enjoy special privileges. That decision led them to agree that whoever became king would grant the rest these same privileges. After much discussion and reassurance all around, they agreed that they would name the king according to the following test: Before daybreak the following morning, they would gather outside the city, mounted on their horses. The owner of the first horse to neigh after sunrise would be named king.

As Herodotus tells the story, of his many slaves, Darius had a crafty groomsman named Oebares. Darius explained the contest to Oebares, who assured him his horse would be the first to neigh. He knew Darius's horse had a fondness for a certain mare in the stable. Legend has it that Oebares rubbed his hands over the mare's genitals that night. The next morning, the conspirators and their groomsmen arrived at the meeting place outside the city. Just as they sun crested the horizon, Oebares, who had held his hands in his pockets all morning, placed them near the nostrils of Darius's horse, who became excited at the smell of the mare and whinnied. Just then,



The Greek researcher and historian Herodotus recorded the expansion of the Persian Empire through its long line of kings and conquerors. His most famous work, *Histories*, consists of nine books and was written on papyrus scrolls.

lightning flashed in the sky, and a clap of thunder shook the ground. Stunned by what seemed to be an act of the gods, the others leaped from their horses and knelt in the dust before Darius, their king.

Even as Darius took the throne and declared himself emperor, word spread among the land that there was trouble at the palace. Various regions of the empire stirred with uncertainty. Fearing both their safety and their sovereignty, they united to form ad hoc political parties, supported by small armies to protect themselves and to overthrow any opposition. With so many factions gathering strength to defend territories or to seize power, the empire Cyrus created was in peril.

As the new emperor, Darius faced what seemed like an insurmountable challenge. Persia had the strongest, most feared armies in the known world. Yet the empire Darius inherited was unstable and on the verge of imploding. At the time, it was doubtful he would succeed in uniting the provinces and regain the strength the empire had under Cyrus. What made Darius a remarkable leader was his inventiveness and perseverance as an emperor who exceeded expectations and pushed the borders of Persia outward in all directions. The Persian Empire reached its peak during his reign, largely due to his ability to rule with imagination. His progressive ideas in the areas of civics and government would come to unite the Persian people. But it would be not an easy road.

CHAPTER

2

The Iranian Plateau Before Darius

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS PRIOR TO DARIUS'S ERA, KINGS HAD RULED IN the area that stretches between present-day Egypt and Turkey westward to what is now Afghanistan. They left evidence in texts and in monuments to their gods. During those times, there were cities but typically no hard borders between areas. Civilizations grew around natural resources, such as rivers. Such is the case with the Iranian plateau, which was part of ancient Mesopotamia.

MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamia was the civilization that grew between and on either side of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the fourth millennium B.C. The rivers created a delta, where the soil was

extremely rich, fertile, and perfect for cultivation. The region extended to the Indus Valley and the Yellow River valley in China.

It was here that the world's most highly developed societies existed. This was one of the four great civilizations where writing was invented. The earliest written language was Sumerian. Cuneiform script, which consisted of characters based on the shape of a triangle or wedge, was invented in Mesopotamia at about the fourth millennium B.C. The area is also known for advances in metalworking (bronze and later iron), which took the shape of weapons and armor. The art and craft of glassmaking and weaving was widespread. Innovative societies devised the first methods of irrigation and water storage, including dams and aqueducts, which were troughs that carried water from its source to where it was needed. This helped the area grow, for though the lands around the rivers were fertile, outlying lands were barren, and without irrigation they were worthless for agriculture. The region was famous for barley, onions, grapes, and apples, among other crops. Sheep and cattle were raised on outlying areas unsuitable for cultivation.

Mesopotamians believed their kings and queens were descended from gods. Perhaps the most well-known king in the Mesopotamian region was Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, who ruled from 1146 B.C. to 1123 B.C. His subjects believed he was the son of the god Nabu. He built a large garden for the queen, called the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Babylon became one of the main cities in Mesopotamia under the rule of Hammurabi (1810 B.C.–1750 B.C.), the first king of the Babylonian Empire. Hammurabi created The Code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest sets of laws ever: the very law upon which Darius would base his own legal system. The name *Babylonia* meant "gateway of the gods." The city was built on both the left and right banks of the Euphrates River. It was surrounded by a wall 300 feet high, 80 feet wide, and 60 miles in length. It had the largest

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon when his queen became homesick for the green, mountainous landscape of her homeland. These gardens were planted on different levels of terraces, with many lush plants hanging over the edges to mimic the look of one giant mountain.

population of any city in the world from 1770 to 1670 B.C. and again between 612 and 320 B.C.

THE NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was very different from that of Babylonia. While the culture of Babylonia revolved around merchants and farmers, Assyria was a well-organized military encampment, full of soldiers and commanders. The center of

life in Babylonia was its priests. All decisions were based on the wishes of the gods as interpreted by the priests and kings, the latter of whom were thought to be descendents of the gods. In contrast, Assyrian kings were generals. The citizens were trained as soldiers, and everyone served the state. In a sense, Assyria was one-dimensional: It existed to fight wars and to steal the wealth of other nations. Babylonia was a multidimensional culture that was founded on a system of beliefs that included the advance of civilization through agriculture, government, engineering, and the arts.

The Neo-Assyrian Empire was the last of the three phases of the Assyrian Empire. The Neo-Assyrian Empire began in 911 B.C. and ended in 612 B.C. After two hundred years of decline, wars, and invasions by nomads and neighbors, Assyria saw a succession of kings who established its boundaries and then embarked on a period of expansion. In 858, Shalmaneser III began an aggressive campaign, during which his armies marched out to plunder its neighbors. These activities began a long-lived feud with Babylonia, which lay to the south of Assyria. For the next 200 years, Assyria would endure a cycle of invasions and revolts: It seized the throne of Babylonia, only to lose it to an uprising.

Meanwhile, Assyria took the surrounding lands, including Egypt. It also engaged the powerful Median Empire to the east, and the land of the Cimmerians to the north. At the dawn of the sixth century B.C., Assyrians ruled from Egypt to the west, north nearly to the Black Sea, and east nearly to the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf. Yet the peoples of these areas were resilient and continued to fight. When Ashurbanipal took the throne in the mid-sixth century, he continued to battle. The war efforts depleted the empire's wealth and resources, and when Ashurbanipal died in 627 B.C., hordes of Scythians, Medes, and Cimmerians began to peck away at Assyria's borders. Eventually, they swept through the empire all the way to Egypt, freeing the cities and their people. By 609 B.C., Assyria was no longer an independent nation.

With the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the freeing of the cities of the Iranian plateau, the region was ripe for another dynasty. It was during the period following the fall of the Assyrian Empire that the Achaemenid Empire took root.

THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

The Achaemenid Empire began in 559 B.C. and lasted through 338 B.C. This was the period in which Darius held his kingship. The period of rule was supposedly begun by Achaemenes, an ancestor of Cyrus the Great. But some historians claim that Darius invented Achaemenes in order to legitimize his rule when he took the throne some years later. In any case, it is certain that Cyrus the Great began the expansion of what was to become the greatest empire of its time. Eventually, it would encompass what is now Afghanistan, the upper Balkan Peninsula, the Black Sea coastal regions, modern Iraq, northern Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Egypt, and Libya. The empire covered an area of 7.5 million square kilometers, the largest empire of classic antiquity, holding a population of 50 million subjects, second only to the vast Roman Empire.

CYRUS

Cyrus II was born sometime between 575 and 590 B.C. Historians Ctesias and Plutarch claimed Cyrus was named for his grandfather, who himself was named from the sun (*Kuros*) or from the word for shepherd (*Kurash*). His parents were Cambyses, a Persian lord, and Mandane, a princess, daughter of the king of Media. Cambyses was a descendent of Achaemenes (ca. 700 B.C.), who had "founded" the empire.

Cambyses was lord of Parshan, a dry, hot region in what is now the southern part of Iran. Cyrus learned horsemanship and weaponry, which consisted primarily of bows and arrows. Cyrus would come to be known as The Great Unifier. He unified two groups of horse warriors into one of the most powerful

forces in the history of the world, and he used a mix of military might and diplomacy to expand the empire. Some historians refer to Cyrus as a genius. Without a doubt, he was respected not only by Persians, but by Greeks and Jews as a fair, intelligent, and worthy leader.

The story of Cyrus's greatness began when he was a young adult. When his father died in 559 B.C., Cyrus became king of Anshan, part of the kingdom of Mede, which extended over most of the Near East. As such, he was expected to pay tribute to the "overlord." From his throne in the capital city of Pasargadae, he plotted a revolt against Media.

The execution of this plan began in 554 B.C., when Cyrus united the Maraphii and the Maspii, two peasant tribes. He added other small tribes and the nomad herders who roamed the region, steadily building his army, with an eye toward larger conquests. His next step was to unite forces with the ruler of the Chaldean Empire (Babylonia), named Nabu-naid. Nabu-naid had a sizeable army, which in January 553 had invaded Hamath, the Amanus Mountains, and Gaza on the Egyptian frontier. Soon Media had been weakened and ceased to be an independent nation. Media became the first satrapy (province) named *Mada*. With the conquest of the Median Empire, Cyrus assumed claims to rule over Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia, and Cappadocia.

As soon as Media fell, the cooperative relationship Cyrus and Nabu-naid had enjoyed became strained. With Media out of the way, the balance of power shifted strongly toward Cyrus. The relationship grew even more strained when his army entered Assyria and later Armenia, both of which had recently been taken by Nabu-naid, and both of which put up no resistance in accepting Cyrus as their king.

Cyrus then conquered King Croesus and took Lydia, which is a part of present-day Turkey but at the time had been part of Greece. This marked the first political contact between Persians and Greeks. In conquering Lydia, Cyrus took the wealth

After Cyrus took the throne in Mesopotamia, he released the slaves who were brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and sent the Hebrews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. Cyrus was seen by the Hebrews as a prophesied ruler.

Croesus had acquired, thus gaining power. Then, after capturing the Iranian plateau, he turned his attention to Babylon. The city and its people were struggling and welcomed his rule without

resistance. In October 539 B.C., he was declared king. Cyrus was heralded by all of Babylon. He encouraged loyalty in various ways, such as rewarding the priests of Babylonia for disloyalty to Nabu-naid.

Cyrus was in command over what was known as the "Fertile Crescent," which stretched from what is now eastern Turkey to the Persian Gulf. He used his position of power to deliver propaganda, through which he stated that he had come as a liberator of the people, one who would restore them to their homes. In fact, he did free people who had been plucked from their homelands and brought to Babylon as slaves by King Nebuchadnezzar some 50 years before. The king had destroyed the temple Solomon built in 1000 B.C. in Jerusalem and had enslaved the Jews. Cyrus freed the Hebrews and sent them home to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

With Cyrus firmly installed as the king of the vast empire, it marked the beginning of Persian history. Persian and Median tribes were united and strong. Cyrus ruled over more land than any ruler in history. He controlled the people of Babylon, Lydia, and Assyria, as well as the Chaldeans, Bactrians, Phoenicians, and Hebrews. He next set his sights on Egypt, but on the way his army encountered and fought the Sarmatians and the Massagetae. Cyrus was killed in battle, allegedly by a woman named Tymiris, one of the Massagetae leaders.

CAMBYSES II

Scholars do not agree on the story of Cambyses II. On one hand, we have the historian Herodotus's account of Cyrus; on the other, we have the Behistun Inscription, which are the writings of Darius. In Herodotus's history, Cambyses II is not a king, but a subject of legend in which he kills the Apis bull and is punished by madness. He then kills his brother and sister, loses his empire, and dies. He is also accused of drunkenness, which may also be a cause of his atrocious crimes.

But the story Darius tells in the Behistun Inscription is altogether different. In Darius's account, as Cryrus's son, Cambyses II was the heir to the throne. His history tells us Cambyses took up where Cyrus left off, by finishing the conquest of Egypt. Cambyses prepared for the march on Egypt by making deals with Arabian chieftains, who supplied water along the way. As Cambyses approached Egypt, the Egyptian king Amasis was surprised that the villages of Cypriot and Polycrates of Samos,

Herodotus (484 B.C.–425 B.C.)

Herodotus was a Dorian Greek historian of the fifth century B.C. He is known as both the Father of History and the Father of Lies because his accounts of history are thought to be heavily embellished and at times even inaccurate. He is best known for writing *The Histories,* which describe the conflict between the ancient Greeks and the Persians.

His early life is the making of great history. It is thought that Herodotus was exiled from his native land, Halicarnassus, after playing a part in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the king. In exile he journeyed to Egypt, the Ukraine, Italy, and Sicily. He also lived in Athens for some time. Here he became a teller of stories. As such, his talent was creating drama in the stories he told. Usually these stories were about political incidents, battles, the general gossip around royal families, the great qualities of foreign lands, and scandals. Nonetheless, it is thought that the purpose of *The Histories* was to glorify the accomplishments of his time and its people and to determine the cause of the conflict between the East and the West.

The first significant portion of *The Histories* is devoted to the rise of the Persian Empire and its initial confrontations with the Greeks. Herodotus goes on to discuss Egypt and finally the great confrontations

who had a substantial fleet, joined forces with the invader. Amasis had expected the support of these people and found himself undermanned. With this advantage, Cambyses's forces easily defeated the Egyptians.

But it would be the only significant conquest for the king. Cambyses then moved his army across the desert toward the kingdoms of Napata and Meroe (now modern-day Sudan). The harsh environment took its toll on his men, and they suffered

between the Persian invaders, led by Darius and later by his son Xerxes, in their failed attempts to conquer the Greek states and place them under Persian rule. *The Histories* provide a striking contrast to the history Darius records in the Behistun Inscription. It is primarily from these two pieces of writing that historians know about the Persian Empire under the rule of Darius.

One of the unique characteristics of the writings of Herodotus is the morality evident in cause/effect relationships. Time and time again the writings emphasize that the folly of military aggression is punished with brutal defeat. Every aggressor is turned back in defeat, often suffering horrible consequences. For example, Herodotus describes how the failure of Cambyses II's defeat of the Ethiopians drove him to madness. The theme he returns to is the very question of what it is that pits the Persians against the Western world.

The accuracy and relevance of *The Histories* is a subject of much debate among historians. Ancient scholars claimed that the accounts were biased and at times inaccurate. More recent archeological evidence leads modern historians to lend the accounts more credence. Herodotus is now recognized as a reasonably accurate teller of events and as a pioneer in history. In any case, *The Histories* and Darius's own account of the events and history of the Persian Empire together tell a compelling story of Persia and Greece under the rule of Darius.

great losses. Fearing his forces lacked the strength to fight, he returned home to recoup. He then attempted to take the Siwa Sasis and later Carthage, both of which were failures.

At this time, according to the writings of Darius, Gaumata was pretending to be Smerdis, the brother Cambyses had killed. By some accounts, Cambyses died by accident. By others, he tried to march on Gaumata, but seeing he would likely fail a coup, he took his own life. In either case, Cambyses was out of the picture, and Darius ambushed Gaumata and assumed the throne. Whether Darius was even heir to the throne is in dispute. But as we know, he and six others assassinated Gaumata, and he convinced his conspirators that he alone should rule the Achaemenid Empire.

CHAPTER

3

Crushing the Rebellion

DARIUS WAS THE SON OF HYSTASPES, SATRAP OF PARTHIA. HYSTASPES WAS a member of a different branch of the Achaemenid family than Cyrus the Great. In other words, he was a distant relative. Many leaders in the region, when they heard of the coup, distrusted that the young king deserved the throne. They made plans to challenge his legitimacy. Sensing revolt, Darius immediately began to establish his credibility and to prepare for the uprisings he was sure would come.

AN EMPIRE IN TURMOIL

By the time Darius became king, Cyrus and his son Cambyses II had conquered a vast land that included all of Asia. Darius's first order of business was to erect a stone statue of

As the first Persian king to require tributes from each of his regions, Darius organized territories into tax districts, designated the minimum tribute to be paid, and appointed governors to oversee the payments. The tributes were often in the form of livestock (*above*) or various metals.

a man on horseback, with the inscription: "Darius the son of Hystaspes gained the Persian kingdom through the prowess of his horse and that of his groom Oebares." Now with a record of his legitimacy as heir to the throne, he set about the real work of the day, which was to establish order in the empire.

He began by creating 23 satrapies within the Persian Empire. He appointed governors for each satrapy and established a tribute, or tax, each would pay. This was a new development in the empire. Both Cyrus and Cambyses did not set a fixed tribute. Instead, they relied on the plentiful donations various people brought to them in return for favorable treatment. Because Darius enforced a more orderly and predictable system of taxation, he was called a "retailer." Taxes came in the form of gold, silver, copper, and other metals or jewels. Sometimes the tribute was livestock or horses. The practice was to melt the metals and pour them into earthen jars. When the jars were full, the clay was removed. The king could then slice off a piece of metal of any size, depending on what he was paying for.

Meanwhile, the unrest grew. According to his own writings, the Behistun Inscription, Darius claimed to have restored Persia to the Achaemenid bloodline. In A.T. Olmstead's *History of the Persian Empire*, Darius says Ahuramazda (his god) had handed the kingdom to him: "These are the lands which obeyed me; by the favor of Ahuramazda, I was their king." In saying this, Darius indicates that the people of the empire supported him at first. But other histories tell a different story.

In fact, only a portion of the satrapies recognized him as the rightful heir to the throne. The satraps (governors of satrapies) of Bactria and Arachosia declared for Darius, but the leaders of all of the other lands in the empire either opposed him or were undecided. This was attributed to the death of the false Smerdis, which instilled the hope of independence among many people. This hope led to large and small revolts across the empire. Various satraps began to plot the overthrow of Darius. They negotiated with one another, often with their lives, to gain position.

By conquering nearby territories, a satrap could swallow their neighbors' armies and thus increase the size of his army. It wasn't long before battle broke out across the land.

Darius was well informed of the goings-on within the empire and made his own plans. Although the false Smerdis had been

Behistun Inscription

The Behistun Inscription is of vital importance to our understanding of the history of ancient Persia. The text is a valued resource for the reconstruction of Darius's reign, specifically in regard to his claim to the throne and to the names of the provinces over which he ruled. But the inscription's most significant benefit is its usage in deciphering the ancient languages of the period. For some 2,000 years, archaeologists and scholars had no clue as to the meaning of the texts preserved from ancient Persia. It was until they deciphered and translated the Behistun Inscription that they were able to unlock the history of this intriguing period in time.

The ascension of Darius to the throne, including his triumph over the false Smerdis and his place in the Achaemenid lineage, is thoroughly described in the inscriptions. These descriptions have helped scholars piece together the history of ancient Persia, though because they represent the official version, and thus Darius's own biased version of the truth, historians are skeptical. In fact, when compared to records that reveal that both Darius's father and grandfather were alive when he was ruler, many historians believe Darius was not the next in line and that he, in fact, usurped the throne.

Aside from contributing to these important revelations, the inscriptions have a much broader impact on our understanding of the times. Through a series of encounters over the course of two centuries, European scholars were able to decipher the text contained in the

killed in Media, the people of the region did not support him as king. Darius set off with a small army to take back Babylon. Meanwhile, Media had risen against him under a native named Phaortes. Phaortes had built a sizeable army that had defeated the palace troops. Assyria, Cappadocia, and Armenia submitted

inscriptions. The quest to bring meaning to the obscure text began in 1617, when the Italian explorer Pietro della Valle made a religious pilgrimage to the region and ran across the inscriptions. He made copies and descriptions of the carving and published these as part of two volumes of letters. But he did not attempt to decipher the writing

In 1764, a German surveyor named Carsten Niebuhr was sent to the region as part of a scientific expedition. As the only survivor of the expedition, Niebuhr published a complete copy of the text. These transcriptions were used by scholars in attempts to decipher the cuneiform scripts. Still little was understood about the meaning of the text. In 1835, Henry Rawlinson, a British officer, located the names of the kings responsible for inscriptions found throughout the region, including those at Persepolis, and he was able to translate many of the characters. These were correlated with a modern dialect of Persia and were published in 1846 as part of his memoirs. Once Rawlinson made the connection between the modern Persian dialect and the ancient cuneiform, the two other languages in which the inscriptions were published—Elamite and Babylonian—were easily translated.

It is as a result of Darius's three-language inscription and the work of Rawlinson and his predecessors that scholars were able to understand cuneiform script and the languages based on it. From that point on, scholars were able to translate the many clay tablets and inscriptions that had been uncovered over the years. This is the greatest significance of the Behistun Inscription.

to him. Only Darius's father, the satrap of Parthia, was able to slow Phaortes with his own army.

When Darius and his army reached Elam, the edge of Babylon, he sent a messenger into the city. The natives were so frightened at the sight of the king's messenger, they chained their ruler and brought him to Darius, who had him killed. This was only a first step for his army since by this time Babylon was in full revolt. As soon as word about the death of Smerdis had reached the region, Nebuchadnezzar III, son of Nabu-naid, the last independent monarch of Babylon, took command of an army in an attempt to reestablish independence. Now, Nebuchadnezzar's troops were hidden in the thick reeds along the Tigris River in order to guard the river crossings and to seize as many boats as they could. Darius had his own troops inflate animal skins and use them to float across the river. His army outflanked the Babylonians and defeated the detachment on December 13, 522. A second battle was fought five days later nearby. Nebuchadnezzar was captured and killed. Darius had triumphed, securing Babylon.

At this time, battles were raging across Persia. Darius had dispatched several detachments to suppress rebellions, and they were having great success. For example, Dadarshish, satrap of Bactria, and one of Darius's few supporters from the onset, quelled an uprising in Margush. Darius left Babylon in February to join a detachment in Kanpada. They swept the region, defeating rebels and slaying their leaders. Often his armies had to return to sites of victories to suppress new uprisings. After two years of fighting, Darius was finally recognized as king across the Persian Empire.

MONUMENT TO THE KING

In about 515 B.C., Darius had ordered a ghostwriter to write his autobiography, which he had planned to serve both as a historical document and a tribute to his kingship. The text was

Darius ordered the construction of the Behistun Inscription to commemorate his reign. The inscription details his success crushing revolts of kingdoms whose leaders challenged his ascendence to the throne.

to document the ancestry of Darius. It would also describe his ascendancy to the throne, his victories on the battlefield, and the geographical makeup of the Persian Empire at the time. Between September 29, 522 B.C., and November 27, 521 B.C., Darius had fought 19 battles and had dethroned 9 kings in his suppression of the revolts. The autobiography would go into great detail about the number of enemy killed, wounded, or taken prisoner—including the locations of the battles. By

September 520 B.C., the autobiography, called the Behistun Inscription, was finished. It was written in cuneiform, the accepted script of Persia, and in two additional languages. Cuneiform script began in the thirtieth century B.C. as a system of pictographs, similar to those used in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Over time, it evolved into a system of abstract symbols. The writer marked the symbols on a clay tablet using a wedge-shaped reed called a stylus.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the inscription is that it shows the same text written in three languages. The languages each use a different script. The Old Persian and Elamite languages appear side by side, with the Babylonian script above them. Darius ordered the inscriptions in multiple languages because he wanted there to be no mistake about who restored the empire to the Achaemenid family line. In fact, by showing identical text in three languages, he provided modern-day historians a kind of roadmap they could use to decipher languages they previously could not translate. (If a scholar knew one language, he could translate the other two.) In this way, the Behistun Inscription is as important to language and to the history of the old world as is the Rosetta Stone, a similar, three-language script written in Egyptian hieroglyph.

The second remarkable characteristic is the location of the script. The text is inscribed high on the face of a cliff in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains in Iran, looking out over the Kermanshah Plain. It is almost unreachable. It is believed that Darius ordered the inscription to be done here so vandals would not destroy it. Some 300 yards above the road that connects the capitals of Babylonia and Media, the inscription is approximately 15 yards in height and 25 yards in width. In addition to the text, the inscription shows a large illustration. This picture shows Darius standing at his actual height of five feet ten inches. In *History of the Persian Empire*, A.T. Olmstead describes Darius as having "a high brow and straight nose. On his head is the war crown, a battlemented gold band studded

with oval jewels and rosettes. His front hair is carefully frizzed, and his drooping moustache is neatly twirled at the tip; the back hair forms on the neck a large bun which reaches almost to the prominent ear."

The king holds a bow with a duck's head at the tip as a sign of his kingship. He stands over a fallen figure, with his left foot on the chest of what is presumed to be Gaumata. Two servants stand beside the king, and in the background are 10 people with their hands tied and ropes around their necks. These figures represent the peoples Darius conquered during the revolts. Floating above the scene is Faravahar, a symbol of the Zoroastrian religion, to which Darius ascribed. The depiction of Zoroaster gives the king his blessing. It was not unusual, at the time, for a king to depict himself in a position of dominance, looked over by an approving god.

As for the writings, they loudly proclaim the triumphs of the king. Each paragraph begins with the passage, "Says Darius, the king," leaving no uncertainty about who was in charge. It begins with the text, "This is what I did during one and the same year after I became king." (In reality, it was two years.) The inscription goes on to describe the murder of Smerdis, the coup of Gaumata, and the killing of Gaumata. Darius names the "seven" who were with him when he slew Gaumata and urges readers to protect the families of these men.

The inscription details the revolts that occurred across Persia. It also contains statements by Darius justifying his actions, calling on Ahuramazda to witness "that is true and not lies: By the grace of Ahuramazda I did much more, which is not graven in this inscription. On this account it has not been inscribed lest he who shall read this inscription hereafter then hold that which has been done by me to be excessive and not believe it and takes it to be lies."

CHAPTER

4

Life in the Persian Empire

WHEN DARIUS HAD FINISHED QUELLING THE REVOLTS, HE TOOK A LOOK around. Indeed, he had inherited an already healthy empire. It covered nearly 2.9 million square miles, the largest territory of any of the classical empires. The borders were secure. The land provided plentiful food in the form of livestock and agriculture. The people were living well. It was time for the king to take stock of the empire.

SATRAPIES

The Persian Empire consisted of a number of provinces, similar to states. These provinces were called satrapies. Each satrapy was defined by a geographical border. Each had its own

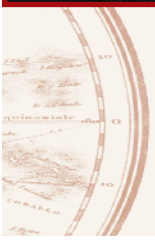
governor, called a satrap. The satrap had a number of important responsibilities, including collecting taxes, maintaining order, recruiting soldiers for the military, and maintaining careful records.

According to the Behistun Inscription, the Persian Empire comprised 23 satrapies. Those we know of are listed here:

Persia	Elam
Babylonia	Assyria
Arabia	Egypt
The countries by the sea	Lydia
The Greeks	Media
Armenia	Cappadocia
Parthia	Drangiana
Aria	Chorasmia
Bactria	Sogdia
Scythia	Sattagydia
Arachosia	Maka

Some of the territories, including those on the near side of the Black Sea as well as those in the areas of Greece on the far side of the Black Sea, are not well named. We know they include Skodra and northeast along the shore nearly all the way to Armenia. As a whole, the empire was spread wide, with a number of diverse geographical characteristics, including desert, mountains, and large bodies of water. The vastness of the area presented challenges to the king. No empire in history had ever been so widespread, and so there was no standard for communications over so large an area.

Darius had a solution. He had a road built moving east/west across the western portion of the empire, which was more



Darius built the Royal Road from Sardes to Susa, the site of his palace, from which a detail is shown (*above*), creating a faster means of spreading and collecting news and rumors. The road also allowed for a more efficient way to deploy forces to suppress revolts.

heavily populated than the eastern part. The road reached from the city of Sardes, near the Mediterranean Sea and in what is now Turkey, to Susa, in what is now present-day Iraq, about 1,650 miles to the east. This road was called the Royal Road. It is thought that portions of the road may have originally been constructed by Assyrian kings. But Darius connected the segments and improved the quality of the road surface. He then employed a system whereby couriers would carry important news back and forth. These couriers were like a relay team: one would ride at a high rate of speed for several hours before handing the documents to the next courier, who was stationed at a designated post. The couriers could cover the entire road in about seven days. If they needed to leave the road to reach remote areas, they could arrive at the farthest borders of the empire in about 15 days. In a somewhat romantic description of the Royal Road, the Greek historian Herodotus, in his *The Histories*, heaps praise upon the couriers: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness of night prevents them from accomplishing the task proposed to them with the very utmost speed." This is thought to be the inspiration for the motto of the United States Post Office, in reference to postal carriers.

The couriers were able to work hand in hand with informants Darius employed to ride among the cities and towns of the empire collecting news. These royal inspectors served as the eyes and ears of Darius. They collected and dispersed information, and their presence served as a constant reminder to the various satraps that they indeed served a king. The Royal Road was instrumental in Darius's success at suppressing further revolts and in identifying and satisfying the needs of the various satraps.

EVERYDAY LIFE

At the time, the Persian Empire comprised a mix of nomadic and sedentary peoples. The lifestyles of these people differed

greatly. The climates in the lowlands regions of the empire were conducive to crops. But a good part of the empire covered the Iranian plateau. Here, the summers were too dry for the land to produce bounteous crops and the winters were too cold. People who lived in these regions were more likely nomadic herders or nomadic pastoralists. These people raised sheep, goats, and cattle.

Over the course of the centuries preceding Darius and throughout his rule, these two groups of people developed relationships and became dependent on one another. The great need both groups had was for water. The farmers needed water to irrigate their crops, and the herders needed it to sustain their livestock. In the drier seasons, the herders moved their animals to the more abundant sources of water, namely rivers of the villages where the farmers grew their crops. Thus, the herders and the farmers traded goods with one another. As the nomadic herders' move to water sources usually coincided with the harvest season, herders were able to trade animals for vegetables and for items manufactured by the sedentary people. These items included textiles, earthenware, metal objects, bridles and other leather goods, knives, and miscellaneous weapons.

Most of the villages had small populations based on extended families. More common were walled cities, which had come into fashion over a number of centuries as villagers were drawn together for protection. These walled cities had durable streets, often laid with limestone or flagstone. There were usually central "squares" that served as gathering places. There were market areas where farmers and manufacturers sold or bartered their goods. There were temples. There was usually some sort of central depot where taxes were paid. In some cities, there were areas where metal ore was processed.

Areas for important crafts and manufacturing were more common. The processing and manufacture of textiles was a prominent activity. Wool was harvested from sheep and sent off

to various cities to be spun and woven, mainly by women. The cloth was then sent to "fullers" who treated it with an alkaline solution. Then the treated cloth was dyed. The most valuable cloth was dyed with a purple solution made from a certain kind of shellfish found off the coast of Syria. The quality of textiles varied greatly. High quality goods were reserved for royalty. At the other end of the scale, the most raw, unfinished textiles were reserved for common people.

The Women of Persia

The women of the Iranian plateau held a variety of positions in society over the course of ancient times, some of which are considered unusual by today's standards. During the Avestan period (1800 B.C.), women fought alongside men and sometimes ruled over them. The legendary women equestrian warriors were called Amazons by Greek writers, who were shocked that a society could allow women such freedoms and rights. There are many remains that depict these women warriors in armor, and many written records of their existence.

It is thought that throughout the subsequent periods, Iranian women were highly respected before the advent of Islam in the seventh century. Women of the Achaemenid Dynasty enjoyed equal status and in some circumstances, special privileges. Women born to royalty actively managed their own estates and often influenced affairs of the state. These included wholesale transactions with suppliers of grain, wine, and animals with buyers and sellers from faraway lands.

Most others were employed and compensated based on their skills and levels of responsibility. New mothers and pregnant women received higher rations than other women, and those women who were head-workers received wages sometimes twice that of their male counterparts.

Some cities had areas for leatherworkers. The leather came from the hides of cows or oxen and the skins of sheep and goats. Pig skins were also used. The skins were tanned by steeping them in a solution of alum, a preservative, together with an infusion made from oak apples. Leather was used for items of clothing, shoes and sandals, shields and helmets, horse harness, slings, the tires of chariots, coverings for chairs and chariots, bags and various kinds of containers, skins for holding liquids, and membranes for drums.

Carpenters and weavers often worked together to create goods such as beds, which may have consisted of a wooden frame and support and a woven sleeping surface. Basket making was a large industry. In a time that predated shelving, baskets were used in every household for storage of items of every sort. Baskets were woven from reeds, palm leaves, and other similar materials. Carpenters made chairs, tables, doors for homes, boats, wagons, chariots, cages for animals, ploughs, and chests and boxes, among other goods. The carpenter acquired hardwoods from the highland areas of the empire. He used a hammer, chisel, saw, and drill.

Another common product of the time was pottery. The principal use of pottery was as a storage device for liquids such as water, milk, oils, and wine. Potters often decorated their wares with figures that represented stories, folklore, and important historical events. Other products included cut gems and glass vessels.

COMMON OCCUPATIONS

Unlike the Greeks at the time, Persians did not embrace slavery as we know it. Every working man or woman was paid in one form or another. A person chose his occupation largely based on the trade his family had established generations before. Typical trades include mat makers, weavers, stonemasons, goldsmiths, leatherworkers, bakers, brewers, oil pressers, brick

makers, carpenters, canal diggers, and builders, to name but a few. Most people undertook an apprenticeship, either to a private master craftsman or with a guild of craftsmen in the chosen craft.

A significant portion of the population served the king directly or indirectly. These included messengers, stable grooms, diplomats, and military personnel. The king's court featured all kinds of professions. These positions were typically reserved for the best tradesmen available, who made their goods specifically for the king and his court.

DIET AND MEALS

The vast majority of the people within the empire had access to enough food to sustain themselves and their families. Meals consisted mainly of vegetables and often included the meat of locally raised animals, mainly beef, mutton, and goat. Fish and sometimes poultry were served, depending on the availability. Commonly served vegetables included onions, garlic, peas, beans, lettuce, radishes, pomegranates, figs, and apricots. Unleavened bread, made of barley, served as a source of carbohydrate. Sesame seeds and oil were used to make cakes and puddings. Dates and honey from bees were also common items.

Beer, often flavored with any variety of herbs, was widely available and was often drunk with meals. Less common was water. Alcoholic beverages were made from dates. In cooler climates, the wealthier citizens might drink wine made from grapes.

Families ate their meals together. Breakfast was followed later in the day with a light meal. Lunch was the big meal of the day. In the evening Persians ate another light meal. Food was served in large bowls. Often all courses were laid out in a single bowl or other vessel. The food and the meal itself was blessed, and thanks were given. People ate with their fingers or with utensils, which included forks, knives, and spoons.

The Persians were known for their festive birthday feasts. They followed these large meals with a variety of desserts, many of which were made from dates, figs, honey, and sesame. Typically, quantities of wine would be consumed at these gatherings.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The art of the Achaemenid period was influenced by many cultures. In fact, under the reign of Darius, many of the artistic techniques that were commonly practiced were borrowed. The royal policy was such that all artistic traits and influences were tolerated. This is especially evident in the details of, for example, the reliefs at Persepolis, a capital city Darius would build, and in the Behistun Inscription. Although the techniques used in creating the detail work of the art of the period were borrowed or heavily influenced by other cultures, the layout and the thinking behind the work had a quality that at the time was unique to Persia. Reliefs, sculptures, and painted scenes were composed with great forethought. Characters and items were arranged in a way that they related to one another and helped tell a story or reflect the mood of the time.

Art reflected not only the notable social and political events, it embraced religion. As religion was a large part of life, it appeared everywhere. Artists and craftsmen paid great heed to important battles and to the gods in the creation of their goods. Sculptures, reliefs, tablets, columns, doors, cornerstones, and other architectural elements were adorned with the figures of religiously significant animals and scenes depicting events. The Achaemenids were skilled at working with gold. Ornate designs were fashioned from gold and applied to all kinds of objects of royalty, from buildings to common utensils and furnishings.

Like the artistic styles, the materials used were imported from the entire region. Timber, gold, stone, metals, and ivory were brought in from the various cities both inside and outside

Built with diverse resources coming from each of the territories in the empire, Persepolis served as the home of government, where official functions and events were held and also where the treasury kept the taxes received from various districts. The ruins of the palace of Darius and Xerxes (*above*) show that the palace was typical of the Achaemenid period.

the empire. Gandara was a source of cedar timber used in the construction of a few important buildings. Gold was carried from Sardis and Bactria. Egypt produced silver and ebony. Ivory

came from Ethiopia, Sind, and Arachosia. Artists, too, were brought in to work in the medium in which they were expert. The woodworkers were Sardians and Egyptians. The bricklayers were Babylonians. The goldsmiths were either Medes or Egyptians.

At Persepolis, the very floor plan of the palace reflects an Achaemenid organization and proportion. The detailed gold work is an exhibition of the high level of craftsmanship and artisanship of the time. Darius wanted the palace to reflect the importance of the empire and the very identity of its inhabitants. The mixing of materials, artists, and artistic styles from the many regions of the empire, brought together in a singular Persian style, reflected Darius's philosophy of what an empire should be as well as his view of the empire itself.

CHAPTER

5

The Governance of Darius

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS OF DARIUS IS THE LEGAL system he developed and instituted. In fact, a good part of present-day Iranian law is based on his law. After two years of revolts, the region was in chaos. Darius recognized the need for a return to ordinary life. He also came to realize flaws in the present structure and policies of the empire. Because his greatest strength was administration, he devoted the greater part of his long reign to reorganization.

As a first step toward restoring a deep organization in the empire, Darius determined that the capital would be founded in the city of Susa. As soon as Elam had been conquered, he began to erect a palace in the new capital city. He and the royal court moved into the palace in 521 B.C.

THE BASIS OF PERSIAN LAW

Once Darius had settled into the capital, he set out to establish a refined set of laws. In the Behistun Inscription, he declared, "By the favor of Ahuramazda, these lands walked according to my law; as was to them by me commanded, so they did." According to Olmstead's *History of the Persian Empire*, the term for "law" is new. Previously, *orders* was used as a word akin to *judgment*. Darius collected his laws in the Ordinance of Good Regulations. Because this law was already in use by 519 B.C., it is assumed that it was based in part on existing law.

It is thought that the Babylonian law served as a model. This law was based on ancient precedents and illustrated by definite cases for each of the various categories of the law. It included a casebook, which a judge would use to help inform him of previous, similar decisions, in conjunction with a logical analysis of the facts presented to him.

At the time, the casebook that served as the model for law had been created by Hammurabi. Cases presented within this book employed a longstanding formula by Summerians. This formula took the form of "if a man does thus and so, then certain consequences follow." The original collection of decisions was recorded on clay tablets and preserved in the archives of Esagila, the temple of Markuk. Darius had these tablets delivered to Susa, where he used them as reference in the formulation of his own laws.

Darius was determined to create a book of laws and cases as lasting as those of Hammurabi. In fact, Darius borrowed many key concepts from Hammurabi and copied many others outright. In those times, kings created laws in the name of their gods. "A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created favor for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many," he writes. "O man, what is the command of Ahuramazda, let this

Hammurabi, one of the early kings of Babylon, wrote a code of laws to establish order and organization in his kingdom. When establishing his own justice system, Darius closely followed the Code of Hammurabi (*above*) while stressing fairness in judgment.

not seem repugnant to you; do not depart from righteousness, do not revolt."

Like Hammurabi, Darius directs the rules of evidence he has laid down. This series of precedents concludes with a case of a judge who reverses his own decision. Darius claims that he, too, is impartial, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. This sets the tone for the way Darius hoped he would be viewed as a ruler. Similar parallels exist. Darius even copies some of Hammurabi's curses, showing that he held no fear of the lawmaker's gods: "Darius the king thus says: You who may be king hereafter, of lies beware. The man who lies destroys utterly, if you would speak, saying: 'My land shall remain whole.'"

As Hammurabi had done, Darius gave special favor to the rules for evidence. He made it clear that the royal judges should remain incorruptible. The laws detail several stories of judges who had taken bribes and the punishments they suffered as a consequence. One such judge who had given an unjust judgment in return for a bribe was slaughtered by Cambyses and skinned. The skin was made into leather, which was used to cover the chair of the new judge. Still, Darius insisted upon fairness in doling out punishment based on the nature and severity of any given crime. Herodotus writes, "On account of one crime not even the king himself may slay anyone, nor may any of the other Persians inflict upon his own slaves a fatal punishment for a single crime. Rather, not until he has reckoned them up and has found that the unjust deeds are more numerous and greater than his services may he give rein to his wrath."

THE ADMINISTRATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF DARIUS'S LAWS

As mentioned, judges heard cases and administered judgment according to law, casebooks, and logic. These judges were spread throughout the satrapies of the Persian Empire. Punishments for crimes were severe. It was typical for offenses against

the state, against the king or his family, or against the king's property to be punishable by death. Most of the punishments were horrible in nature. In *History of the Persian Empire*, Olmstead writes, "There is little information on the punishment for ordinary crimes, but mutilation of hands or feet or blinding appear to have been common."

The immediate success of these laws, and the entire reform of the legal system, can be seen in documents that survive from Babylonia. It is known that prior to Darius, Cyrus the Great had left the internal administration as it had been for many years. In contrast, Darius had sweeping reforms in mind. He dismissed the native officials and replaced them with new individuals who were loyal to his particular ethic. He also instilled in all officials a sense of unity and fairness toward all those who served, thus helping them to bond and dedicate themselves to their work.

Darius was proud of his system of law. It had taken hold throughout the land and served the citizens of Persia well. As it turned out, his pride had reason. His were considered the authoritative laws well after his death and as late as 218 B.C. Even the second-century Iranian law book the Videvat, the Antidemonic Law, contains some of the similar laws and language.

ECONOMY

Throughout the reign of Darius, the citizens were, for the most part, content. They were by no means starving. Instead, the people either produced or procured anything they could want. Those satrapies that turned to revolt did so with the motivation for sovereignty, or independence, rather than because they believed they suffered unjust treatment. Herodotus mockingly refers to Darius as a "huckster" because of his business practices and system of taxation. But Darius was as astute a financier as he was an administrator and lawgiver.

Above all else, the greatest strength Darius possessed was his keen understanding of the importance of a sound economic

policy. Darius knew that if the state was to be stable it would have to be funded with a steady and reliable stream of money. If he wanted to expand the empire, he would need money to fund invasions of neighboring lands. He must have also been aware of the importance of efficiency and that sloppy accounting would mean a loss of funds. The problem of inefficiencies was widespread at the time. Gold, jewels, precious metals, livestock, and almost every other form of currency was likely to go unaccounted for. They were prone to be lost, misplaced, or stolen. Darius's solution to this problem was to completely reform the economic system. And he started at the bottom.

Zoroaster

Zoroaster was a revolutionary prophet of ancient Persia. It was believed he lived sometime about 800 B.C., though some scholars believe he lived as early as 1400 B.C. Zoroaster, who is also known as Zarathustra, was thought to have lived in the northeastern part of Persia, in Bactria, the site of present-day Afghanistan. According to Greek accounts, he and his wife Hvovi had three daughters and three sons. He lived to 77 years of age.

During his lifetime, he was known as a sage, magician, miracle worker, and poet. When he was 30, he claimed to have been illuminated by Ahuramazda. Zoroaster immediately began to spread the word of his new knowledge. He did not try to reverse the belief in the polytheistic religions practiced in Iran at the time. Yet he preached that Ahuramazda was the one god who alone was worthy of worship, who had created heaven and earth, light and darkness, and who was the very center of nature itself.

Zoroaster's monotheistic concept of God (that is, that there is only one god) is believed to have influenced the religions of Judaism and

The first step toward building a sound economic system was the implementation of a standardized system of weights and measures. With such a system in place, all traders across the empire would use the same amounts when they paid for goods. The "king's measure" was approximately one bushel in volume. This unit of measure was already spreading throughout the kingdom and supplanting the various measures used by private traders. Darius also introduced a new weight, the *karsha*. Several examples of weights used for measuring, inscribed and polished, were found by archaeologists, who determined that one karsha weighed more than 20 pounds. Other units of measure

Christianity. His ideas about life and the anti-life are thought to have been the origins of what has become the classic battle between good and evil. Zoroaster preached of the afterlife, claiming that the earthly state was connected to a state beyond. In theory, the god rewards the man who lives a just life by allowing him passage into the afterlife. After death, the soul of the man passes over the Bridge of the Requiter, and judgment is passed by Ahuramazda. The good enter the kingdom of everlasting joy and light, and the bad are sent to an eternity of horror.

The teachings of Zoroaster were not studied for thousands of years because scholars could not translate the sacred texts created at the time he lived. But his legend was lasting, and accounts of his existence and religion were found in Persian and Greek texts, including the Behistun Inscription and in the Greek historian Herodotus's *The Histories*. Finally, The *Avesta* (the sacred texts of Zoroastrianism) were translated by a French historian named Abraham Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1835). Now historians the world over study these writings as religion.

were used as well. These included the *mana*, and a round stone, whose name has not been determined.

Despite these reforms, Darius was well aware that the very system of weighing out precious metals and other goods was an antiquated form of exchange. In fact, by this time in history, the minting of coin money had long been in use in parts of the empire. At about the time written history came into being, Babylon had moved beyond using bartering as a sole means of exchange. That kingdom had reached a more advanced economy that included coin money. Writing went hand in hand with the emergence of this modern economy. The first clay tablets that contained what historians consider to be early writing contain lists of goods written as pictographs. This was the first form of bookkeeping.

The very first unit of exchange was the "measure" of barley. Eventually, measures of precious metals were substituted. When coins came into use, they retained the names of the earlier units of measure. One hundred sixty *she* made a *shiqlu*, or what is referred to in the Bible as a *shekel*. Sixty *shiqlu* made a *mana*, and 60 *mana* made a *talent*. The *talent* weighed 66 pounds. So the *mana* weighed just over a pound.

Monetary reform did not affect everyone in the empire. Outside of the cities, barter was much more common. But even though farmers in the outlying regions of the empire may never have exchanged money, their transactions were recorded on clay tablets and preserved as records. On the other hand, the merchants reaped great profit from the exchange of money for goods. For them there was a great advantage in the fixed standard values of goods and from the exchange of coins that had a uniform weight and level of purity. As a show of their local autonomy, the merchant cities established mints and manufactured their own coins according to the king's rules. These coins were the standard in trading in the regions where they existed.

As metals themselves were still used for payment, Darius had to standardize their values. This reevaluation of the values

of metals was drastic and had a significant effect on many merchants and traders, some of whom found themselves underpaying their tributes. A tablet from the treasury of Darius documents some of this injustice. The problem came about when a merchant accepted a certain measure of precious metal in exchange for goods. The merchant was unlikely to test the metal for its purity, and thus the metals he received may have been less pure than the standard Darius established. When it came time to pay the king's tribute, the merchant was forced to pay more in weight in order to compensate for his impure metals. Darius's tax collectors tested the metals they took as tribute, calculated the difference in value, and charged the merchant the difference. Although this caused some consternation, merchants and traders caught on fast, and within a few years they learned to test payments they were given. This made for a more uniform exchange of precious metals across the empire and strengthened the economy from the top down.

At this time, the population of the empire seems to have grown significantly. It is suspected that this sudden growth can be attributed to the number of exiled Jewish slaves Cyrus had freed. This growth in population encouraged the economy initially. Internal trading increased dramatically. There exist recorded documents that detail loans made to men for trading "on the road." These men would travel the land buying goods and selling them for profit. They paid their loaner a tax in return for the loan. They were permitted to make only the trades they had promised from the outset. The remainder of the profits was theirs to keep.

Meanwhile, there is a record of increased government interference with the economic life of the country. Tablets indicate that in 508 B.C. there existed a royal storehouse for barley that was paid to the king as tribute. Land was sold by a measurement established by Darius, the *king's cubit*. But by far the most significant development was the installation of what is referred to as the "one-eighth." This was the amount deducted by the royal treasury

The *Vase of Darius* (*above*) depicts a business transaction, or possibly a tribute payment, in process during the reign of Darius. The king believed that a strong economy would fund his empire expansion and provide stability throughout the region.

for coins paid as taxes. In effect, this was what the king skimmed off the top taxes, which was set aside for unspecified use.

Records indicate that early in the reign of Darius the overall price levels kept pace with the steady but moderate increases

seen through Cyrus's reign and through the preceding empire, the Chaldean period. But within several years of Darius's reign, price levels made a dramatic and sudden jump and then stabilized until his death. Historians believe this jump, the result of well-meaning reforms, had a significant effect on the economic troubles the empire would face in the generation following the reign of Darius.

CHAPTER

6

Religion in the Persian Empire

PRIOR TO THE TIME DARIUS TOOK THE THRONE, THE PEOPLE OF PERSIA were by and large polytheistic. That is, they worshipped several gods simultaneously. Darius had different ideas. He was a monotheist: He believed there was one and only one true god. He took the position that the unique qualities attributed to other gods were all a part of a greater deity. His god was Ahuramazda, the same god worshipped by the great prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra), who preceded Darius in time. As with the civic and economic structure of the empire, Darius thought it best to encourage the people to worship as he worshipped. But he realized a state-mandated religion could possibly create divisions among the people and regions of Persia. He would have to compromise.

ZOROASTER

Sometime around 650 B.C., a new religion caught on in the region. The prophet who created this religion years before was called Zarathustra (Zoroaster in Greek). Some historians believe Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion, meaning there is one god that represents good and one that represents evil. According to Zarathustra, the universe was under the control of two contrary gods, Ahuramazda, the god of creation, who made all that is good, and Ahriman, the god of dark and evil. These two gods are equals engaged in an epic struggle over creation. Zarathustra maintained that at the end of time, Ahuramazda will triumph. We know from examining many other religions that all of creation and all of human history and experience can be understood as part of this struggle between light and dark, good and evil. Other historians maintain Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion, meaning there exists only one god. In this case, the god is Ahuramazda. Regardless of the nature of Zoroastrianism, Zarathustra devoted his life to refining the religion, to spreading its word throughout the land, and to converting the people of the Iranian plateau.

Darius, too, was monotheistic. In all of the inscriptions created during the time of his reign, no god but Ahuramazda is mentioned by name. In fact, Ahuramazda appears as reference to nearly every claim and thought written in official records. Darius sings the praise of the great creator and lawgiver. He admits dependence on divine aid, often crediting the god for laws, outcomes of battles, and even for his defeat of the false Smerdis and ascension to the throne. He also calls on Ahuramazda to protect him and his family as well as all of his deeds.

While Darius held beliefs that strictly adhered to his religion, he was aware that his empire consisted largely of polytheistic subjects. No matter how strongly he objected to their beliefs, their worship, their temples, and their politically powerful priests, he was forced to conceal his personal feelings and

Darius believed in Zoroastrianism, a religion created by the prophet Zoroaster, seen (*above*) consulting two oracles. Darius believed the god of good, Ahuramazda, was responsible for many of the fortunate events in his life.

beliefs. By demonstrating religious tolerance, he granted his subjects a very important freedom: the freedom to worship the god of their choosing.

ZOROASTER'S CONGREGATION

While Darius was a strong believer of Zoroastrianism, he was not part of the community of worshippers. At the time, some of Zarathustra's companions were still alive and spreading the

word. While his followers may have been satisfied with the oral transmissions of their master's prophecy, priests saw the value in preserving an exact record for future generations. The only way to accomplish this was to write them down. The priests did not create a Bible that told the story of Zoroastrianism, which could be read to the converts. Instead, they had their scribes prepare manuscripts that were used to verify the oral incantations of the priests during spoken ritual. These manuscripts were the three prayers: Ahuna Vairya, Ashem Vohu, and Airyema Ishyo.

New Year's at Persepolis

The Persian New Year is one of the biggest celebrations of the year. The holiday known as *Norooz* is celebrated on the vernal equinox, on March 21. The tradition goes back more than 15,000 years.

Darius celebrated the tradition in grand fashion at Persepolis. Preparations began a good month before the celebration. Royalty from across the empire were invited to the palace. They traveled with large entourages and brought elaborate gifts. The king held court and received his visitors one by one. The high priest of the empire was the first to greet the king. Next came government officials. Each visitor offered the king a gift and received one in return. This procession lasted five days. On the sixth day, the king held a special audience for the royal family and court. After 16 days, the celebration ended.

The Apadana, the largest and most magnificent building of Persepolis, was used primarily for receptions by the kings. The columns of this building are adorned with reliefs showing scenes of the New Year's festival, including the processions of the kings of the 23 nations of Darius's empire and their courts, their soldiers, guards, and royal chariots. The gifts exchanged include silver and gold vessels, weapons, woven textiles, jewelry, and animals. These celebrations must have been grand indeed.

Though Darius called on the god Ahuramazda to bless his work, he did not cultivate a congregation of believers. He had been raised in the shadow of the religion. His father, Hystaspes, who was a satrap, had encouraged the religion to flourish. But by the time Darius took the throne, he had grown out of touch with the religious community. Thus, during his reign, he allowed the community to languish. Zoroastrian priests could not understand this neglect and grew discouraged. But because Darius entrusted them to keep the religion alive, they continued their teachings, and Zoroastrianism continued to hold significance for many within the Persian Empire.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE

Although Darius held no respect for deities other than Ahuramazda, he held the practical studies and findings of other religions in high regard. This was especially true for the Babylonian priesthoods, which made important contributions to the sciences. He relied on the scribes to translate his dictation into other languages, especially Akkadian. He also applauded the scientists who made the calendar more exact.

It is important to understand that at that time science was not an enemy of religion. Instead, it was an important part of the daily practices of the priesthood. Babylonian priests had been practicing astronomy for centuries. The study of astronomy went hand in hand with their view of the heavens as a holy thing. They used scientific methods to quantify the heavens, which would bring them closer intellectually to their deities. This was evident in their work on the calendar. They instituted an eight-year cycle that brought the close of the lunar and solar years in nearly exact agreement. In 747 B.C., the Babylonian king Nabunasir adopted this calendar, and it remained standard for nearly 200 years, when improvements were made.

During the Chaldean period, which preceded the Achaemenid Dynasty, scientists gained more knowledge. They observed

Darius respected those with religious beliefs that differed from his, including the high priests of Babylon. These priests performed important services to the empire and to world culture by translating common documents and decrees and through their scientific experiments. Their research into astronomy led to a more exact calendar, inscribed in stone (*above*).

that the moon cycle is 27 days, and that Venus returns to the same position in the sky 4 days shy of 8 years. They also made more long-term observations about astronomy. For instance, they determined that Mars has a cycle of 47 years minus 12 days, and that Saturn has a cycle of 59 years.

Babylonian priests took their observations a step further by creating tables that predicted the cycles of stellar objects. They used complicated mathematics that had been developed some 15 centuries earlier. Remarkably, their astronomical tablets

reflect a greater level of accuracy than many of the scientists that followed until the invention of the telescope.

More advanced studies were undertaken by the later astronomers of Babylonia. One great Babylonian astronomer in particular is known for his advanced work. At about the beginning of the fifth century B.C., Nabu-rimanni, a mathematician who studied the stars, set forth to determine the true date of the new moon as it related to lunar or solar eclipses. He created a table of eclipses that was used side by side with tables created previously. When complete, these tables comprised 17 or 18 columns and were considered complex for the time. They allowed astronomers to predict eclipses based on observations of lunar cycles. Nabu-rimanni's work is recorded in a textbook, which gives directions for the constructions of these lunar computational tables and eclipse tables.

INFLUENCING THE GREEKS

The science of the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau had a great influence on their neighbors the Greeks. One of Greece's most famous philosophers, Thales, was said to be of Phoenician descent. Some historians believe he studied with the priests of Egypt, who passed their knowledge of geometry on to him. He is known for devising a novel way to measure the height of a pyramid in relation to a stick. This involved setting up his walking stick at the edge of a great pyramid's shadow and drawing two triangles. He showed that the height of the pyramid bore the same relation to the length of the stick as one shadow to the other.

Thales was the first Greek to inscribe a right-angled triangle in a circle. In addition, he determined that the seasons were fixed by the sun's course from solstice to solstice. He gained information from the Chaldeans that helped him compute the size of the sun as $\frac{1}{720}$ of the solar circle.

We also now know that from the time of Homer, the names of constellations and the associated stories are almost all translations or adaptations of the Babylonian names for the same constellations. The great philosopher Pythagoras, of the same generation as Thales, also studied with the priests of Egypt and Babylon. Pythagoras was the first Greek to recognize the identity of the first morning star and first evening star, which was known by Babylonians 15 centuries prior. The Pythagorean theorem was not his invention. It had existed in Babylon for some time prior to his "discovery" of it.

The most significant difference between the science of the Babylonians and that of the Greeks is in the approach and "meaning" of their respective discoveries. For the Babylonians, science was always the child of religion. It was a way to give a practical framework to the mystical ideas surrounding their gods. Babylonians were comfortable using mathematics to justify or to further their theories. In contrast, the Greeks' science and philosophy did not mesh as closely with their religious beliefs. In fact, their science, at least in spirit, did not support religion. Therefore, Greek science is said to be agnostic, or without consideration of gods.

CHAPTER

7

The Building Projects of Darius

LIKE ALL RULERS OF ANCIENT TIMES, DARIUS WAS OBLIGATED TO PAY tribute to his god, his kingdom, and his reign by constructing monuments. His came in the form of palaces in two of the empire's capital cities. The first was begun in Susa immediately after the king's armies had thwarted the rebellions. The second was begun several years later at Persepolis, which was to be Darius's permanent home and his greatest monument. One of the most important attributes of the monuments and inscriptions Darius commissioned was the way he used them to acknowledge the diversity of the empire's peoples. Every monument was inscribed in the languages of the region and in the royal languages. It was in this characteristic that we can see

Darius wanted all the people of the region, present and future, to acknowledge the greatness of his empire.

SUSA

Susa is located approximately 150 miles east of the Tigris River; it had once been part of the Elamite empire. But records indicate it is one of the oldest-known settlements of the region that is now Iran. Although there is evidence that a village existed on the site as early as 7000 B.C., it is thought that the actual city of Susa was founded sometime around 4000 B.C. Cyrus had taken the city during the initial expansion of the Achaemenid Empire in 538 B.C. Later, Cambyses II moved the capital of the empire from Pasargadae to Susa. It was to Susa that Darius had rushed upon hearing of the death of Cambyses II to slay the false Smerdis. And when Darius crushed the Babylonian uprising at the outset of his reign, he made the palace his temporary headquarters in 521 B.C.

The great inscriptions at Susa are the only texts of its kind in that they tell the story of how he built the palace and of how he imported products from all over the empire:

"A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one of many, one lord of many.

"Darius the King says: By the grace of Ahuramazda I built this palace.

"Darius the King says: Ahuramazda, the greatest of the gods, created me, made me king, bestowed upon me this kingdom, great, possessed of good horses, possessed of good men.

"By the grace of Ahuramazda, my father Hystaspes and Arsames my grandfather—these both were living when Ahuramazda made me king in this earth.

"To Ahuramazda thus was the desire: he chose me as his man in all the earth; he made me king in all the earth.

"I worshipped Ahuramazda. Ahuramazda bore me aid. What was by me commanded to do, that he made successful for me. What I did, all by the grace of Ahuramazda I did.

"This palace which I built at Susa, from afar its ornamentation was brought. Downward the earth was dug, until I reached rock in the earth. When the excavation had been made, then rubble was packed down, some 40 cubits in depth, another part 20 cubits in depth. On that rubble the palace was constructed.

Weapons and Warfare

Ancient Persia emerged as a military power under Cyrus the Great. The Persian army, whose structure of command was adopted by Darius, consisted of multiple units. These included infantry and cavalry. The infantry were foot soldiers who carried spears. The cavalry rode in chariots or were mounted on horses.

Infantry usually operated in phalanx form, in which a solid wall of men advanced on the enemy. The greater the number of soldiers, the greater the chances of success. In addition to spears, infantrymen carried swords, clubs, axes, and knives. Persian infantrymen wore light armor that offered protection; this allowed the soldiers to move freely.

Chariots were useful for fast transport and became popular as states grew in size and the rapid suppression of uprisings became a priority. However, they were useless in rocky terrain. They were light enough that they could be floated over rivers. Typically, two men rode in a chariot. One controlled the chariot while the other, armed with a bow, fired at the enemy.

"And that the earth was dug downward, and that the rubble was packed down, and that the sun-dried brick was molded, the Babylonian people performed these tasks."

The inscription goes on to describe the various materials used in the construction in the palace, including timber and precious metals, where they came from, and what peoples procured them.

He concludes the inscription, "Darius the King says: At Susa a very excellent work was ordered, a very excellent work was brought to completion.

The tactics of the Persian army were relatively simple. They employed masses of troops with the aim of outnumbering the opponent. The preliminary strategy was based on the hope that the sight of their numbers alone would intimidate the enemy into surrender. If the enemy chose to engage, the Persian commanders would send in the first of potentially three waves of soldiers. These were the least skilled infantrymen, but because the force was so large they always had a numeric advantage and were likely to overwhelm the enemy. At the same time, bowmen would shoot volley after volley of arrows toward the rear of the enemy formation. For enemy troops massed for battle, these arrows were hard to avoid. If necessary, a second wave of more skilled soldiers followed. These soldiers were supported by cavalry, who attacked from the sides. The idea was to pin the enemy against a natural formation, such as a mountain or a body of water, so retreat was impossible. Finally, if the second wave failed to subdue the enemy, the highly skilled Immortals were sent in to finish the battle.

These tactics were successful for much of Darius's reign, but the simplicity and inflexibility of the phalanx formation proved to be his army's undoing when facing the highly trained Greeks, whose rapid movements confused the Persian troops.

"May Ahuramazda protect me, my father Hystaspes, and my country."

Another significant monument ordered by Darius is a statue of the king that reflected his journeys. This statue is unique in two ways: It is the only example from the Persian Empire of a freestanding statue, and it includes the only list of nations subject to the king written in hieroglyphs. It was carved in Egypt and transported to Susa, where it was erected at the east gate of the king's palace.

The central scene carved into the base of the statue includes the god Hapi, seen uniting Upper and Lower Egypt, using symbolic plants that come from each region: the lotus and the papyrus. The statue includes hieroglyphs representing the various regions under Darius's control. Finally, a belt worn by the king includes this description:

"A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, and who made Darius king.

"This is the statue, made of stone, which Darius ordered to be made in Egypt. This is how everyone who will see this in the future, will know that the Persian man ruled in Egypt.

"I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, king of all peoples, king in this great earth far and wide, the son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid.

"King Darius says: May Ahuramazda protect me and what I did!"

Susa is thought to be Darius's favorite residence, where he entertained distinguished guests from outside the empire. Although the site is less well known than Persepolis, in antiquity it was the other way around. The authors of the Bible knew much about Susa and seemed to have ignored Persepolis. In any case, we know that soon after he began construction on the palace at Susa, he laid plans for an even grander palace at Persepolis.

Rebuilt by Darius, Susa is one of the oldest cities in the world and was the king's favorite residence during his reign. Susa was built with materials from the empire's conquered territories, showing the expanse and wealth of Persia, while walls of Darius's palace featured colorful glazed bricks depicting soldiers and winged monsters (*above*).

PERSEPOLIS

The palace at Persepolis was Darius's grandest tribute to the empire. To the king, it was a display of majesty befitting an empire as great as the Persian Empire. He planned it to be a place with royal atmosphere, where his court would celebrate special events.

Persepolis was situated near the Pulwar and Kur rivers. Darius ordered the construction of the Apadana Palace and the Debating Hall. The main architectural feature was its columns, which were made of wood rather than stone. These were carved from the giant cedars of Lebanon and teak trees of India. Here and there, stone columns were used. The bases of these columns were stone. The other significant architectural feature was the liberal use of bas-reliefs that reflect the spirit, beliefs, and practices of the Persians.

The plan included three areas: a military quarters, the treasury, and the king's quarters and guest houses. At its latest stages, long after the death of Darius, the palace included the Great Stairway, the Gate of Nations, the Apadana Palace, the Hall of a Hundred Columns, the Tripylon Hall and Tachara Palace, the Hadish Palace, the Palace of Artaxerxes III, the Imperial Treasury, the Royal Stables, and the Chariot House. The site was chosen so that the palace could be surrounded by a terrace, part of which was carved out of the adjacent mountain and part of which was built from the ground up. Most of the buildings were constructed with marble and limestone cut from the mountain. The terrace was made of limestone joined with metal clips.

The terrace was accessed by a pair of broad stairways, called the Persepolitan stairway. The steps were placed so that horses could ride easily up and down. They led to a small yard across from the Gate of Nations. Tunnels for sewage were dug underground through rock. The site boasted a water storage tank carved from the mountainside.

One of the main attractions of the palace was the Gate of All Nations. The name refers to the satrapies and subjects of the empire. The main entrance featured four columns. There were two additional entrances, each of which included a two-leaf door with pivoting mechanisms. At the main entrance stood a pair of minotaurs, a mythical creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull.

One of the more impressive buildings in Persepolis, the Apadana (audience hall), was built to hold more than a thousand inhabitants and featured a high roof held up by columns that stretched 27 yards from the ground. The palace was used for official celebrations and events, such as the arrival of the new year. A detail of the entranceway staircase and columns is shown (*above*).

The centerpiece of the entire palace was the Apadana Palace. This was where Darius entertained his audiences. The structure was begun in 515 B.C. and was not completed for another 30 years, when Darius's son Xerxes was king. It featured a large, square hall. Each side of the hall was lined with 72 columns, which supported the ceiling. Likenesses of the heads of animals were carved into the upper parts of the columns, which were joined by large beams of oak and cedar. Mud and stucco were used to finish the walls. Outside, at each corner, stood a tall tower. The walls were covered with pictures of lions, bulls, and flowers. Darius's name appears in gold in several places.

Although Persepolis was both grand and majestic, it served as a symbolic capital more than a practical capital city. Its location in a relatively hard-to-reach region of the empire prohibited it from serving as a center of trade and commerce. The empire's other capitals, namely Susa, Babylon, and Ecbatana were more suitably located and were in fact the functional capitals. Perhaps this is why Persepolis was unknown to the only other major civilization in the larger area, that of the Greeks, until it was taken some years later by Alexander the Great of Macedon.

THE SUEZ CANAL

In addition to the palaces at Susa and Persepolis and the various smaller monuments to the empire, Darius engaged in various civil work projects. Among these were aqueducts, the Royal Road, and a system of roadways throughout the empire. Of these civic projects his most notable contribution was the completion of the Suez Canal. The canal is a waterway that runs between the easternmost branch of the Nile River and the Red Sea. The Twelfth Dynasty Egyptian pharaoh Senusret III (1878 B.C.–1839 B.C.) began the construction of the canal during his lifetime. It is 101 miles in length and 984 feet wide at its narrowest point. Two triremes—the long, oared boats used to transport goods and people—could pass side by side with oars

extended. According to Herodotus, a trireme could travel the canal end to end in about four days.

When the canal was finished in 498 B.C., sailors could circumnavigate the Arabian Peninsula and sail from Babylonia to Memphis. The canal was one of the most important incentives to increase trade among various regions, and without a doubt one of the great achievements of Darius. Darius was not shy about exaggerating his accomplishments. In the spirit of celebrating his accomplishments, he commissioned the Suez Inscription. The Suez Inscription, carved in pink granite in Persian, Elamite, and Egyptian, contains the following passage:

"Darius the King says: I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt. I gave order to dig this canal from a river named Nile which flows in Egypt, to the sea which goes from Persia. Afterward this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire."

Darius returned to Egypt and to the site of the canal to celebrate its opening. There he hosted a large celebration. His aim was to use the opportunity to show the power and the might of the empire. To further show his strength, he took the opportunity to execute the satrap of Egypt, Aryandes. This was a significant gesture, to say the least. Darius had installed Aryandes as satrap and ordered him to consult the wisest soldiers, priests, and scribes to help refine his legal system. He charged the satrap with transcribing the laws and the system in the official language of the empire and the language of the local administration, so that the court and the Egyptian judges would work from the same laws. But Aryandes was suspected of leading a revolt that, despite the fact that it was easily subdued, warranted punishment.

CHAPTER

8

The Invasion of Scythia

THE SUPPRESSION OF BABYLONIAN REVOLT ESTABLISHED THE AUTHORITY of Darius throughout the entire empire. Because Babylon was such a large, well-fortified, and wealthy city, his defeat of it signified that his army could defeat an uprising by any of the smaller states. They were afraid of him, and he sensed this fear, and it gave him power.

As far as Darius was concerned, this was all well and good. It was important that the provinces within the borders of the empire fell in line. But his ultimate conquest lay beyond the borders, in Europe and the Greek states. At the time, he must have felt uncertain about his chances with them. Scythia would be a good test. Darius felt that the Scythians were not as strong as the Athenians, Spartans, and peoples of the surrounding

areas. Nonetheless, the Scythians posed no small challenge. It was they who had thwarted the advances of the great Cyrus some years before.

The Scythians were a group of tribes that occupied the inhospitable lands to the north of the Persian empire and ranged to the shores of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. This land also ran up to the banks of the Danube River. This includes what today is Kazakhstan, the eastern Ukraine, the northern part of the Caucasus, and Bulgaria. They were known as savages who lived simply but who were fearless, ruthless, and effective when called into battle.

A king's motivation to defeat and consume another nation can come in many forms. Most often, it has to do with the king's desire to impose his government on a weaker nation. Other times, his motivation is vengeance for a previous act of aggression. It is thought that Darius was motivated by self-glory rather than by any real interest in "giving" his government to a nation of renegades. His wish was to flex his military muscle and impose his god-given will on the weaker, less-organized Scythians.

THE PLAN

Darius planned to first attack the Scythian countries north of the Danube. This entailed a long journey through Asia Minor and into Thrace before his troops crossed the Danube into Scythian territory. The journey would be both hazardous and costly. His most accomplished military commanders would be required to lay the groundwork for such an excursion, planning the continual supply of the army with food, water, and goods. Darius's brother, Artabanus, advised the king that the rewards of such an endeavor hardly justified the great costs. After all, the trip to Scythia would be dangerous, and the country had very little of value to offer. But Darius ignored this advice and commanded his army to prepare for the journey.

As was typical of military strategists at the time, he dispatched scouts to traverse the route planned for the army. These men reported back with important information, and they

The Trireme

The Persians also deployed a navy in the first-known large-scale naval operations. These battles involved a complex arrangement of fleets with a large number of ships. More importantly, the Persians coordinated their navy with land attacks in well-organized assaults on coastal areas.

The Persian naval vessel was called a trireme. This was a long ship with a main sail and a rudder, built for speed. Three rows of rowers, one to an oar, lined each side of the ship. These rowers sat below deck, protected by the sides of the ship. With so many rowers, these fast ships could advance rapidly on an enemy vessel. They were also heavily armored to withstand ramming by other ships. A division of marines, essentially foot soldiers trained in hand-to-hand combat, rode on the deck above the oarsmen.

Because the boats lacked long-range weapons, battles were fought when the triremes pulled alongside enemy vessels, and the marines would board the other ship and engage in hand-to-hand combat with knives, axes, and other hand-combat weapons. Triremes were the predominant warship of the Mediterranean area from the seventh to fourth centuries B.C.

Persian engineers also played a part in utilizing the trireme. They tied the boats together to make bridges over rivers and narrow inlets. Armies crossed these bridges into enemy territory. Later, they would be used to carry supplies to the troops. Triremes were also deployed to carry supplies through the open water, where they would land at designated points to resupply the massive Persian army.

prepared the provinces for the eventual passage of the troops. These provinces were ordered to supply their own troops and horses, which would join the march as the army passed through. Mandrocles, an engineer from Samos, was charged with constructing a bridge of boats across the Bosporus, also known as the Istanbul Strait.

The army included both volunteers and draftees. Those who volunteered followed the promise of adventure and of plunder. Those who were ordered to enlist had little choice but to go. Herodotus tells us of an old man named Cebazus whose three sons were drafted. Cebazus petitioned the king to allow one of his sons to remain home to care for him. Darius granted the man a favor by allowing all three of the sons to remain at home. Cebazus returned to his home quite happy with this result. Meanwhile, the king ordered guards to kill the three men and to send their remains to Cebazus with a message to their father that his sons had been brought to him, released eternally from their obligation to serve the king.

THE JOURNEY TO SCYTHIA

Darius was to lead the troops from Susa to the shores of the Bosporus, where Mandrocles was overseeing the construction of the bridge of boats. There, the king and his army would rendezvous with ships and troops from Asia Minor. The Ionians, whose territory bordered the Aegean Sea, provided a fleet of galleys that would eventually sail up the Danube River. The men these ships carried were to sail up the river and at a designated point build a bridge across the river.

Meanwhile, Darius and his troops would cross the Bosporus by bridge, march across Thrace, and arrive at the point along the Danube River just as the second bridge was completed. Such forethought in the timing made Darius's plans seem advanced when compared to the typical military strategies of the times.

Darius's desire to expand his empire and acquire more territories brought his gaze upon Scythia. Despite Scythia's distance from Persia, Darius was determined to conquer these tribes and enlisted the help of the Ionians, experienced sailors with galleys to help them cross the Danube River into Scythia. The pottery detail (*above*) depicts an Ionian galley.

The journey went well. Darius marched at the head of his army of 700,000 men as they crossed Asia Minor. Darius was in no great rush to reach the Bosporus. He stopped at various locations along the way so that his engineers and architects could

build columns and monuments to commemorate his progress. The inscriptions on these structures offered great praise to Darius as a military leader. In many ways, the journey was more like a parade than it was like a march.

When they arrived at the Bosporus, they were greeted by a stunning scene. Herodotus tells of the magnificent scene, of the 600-galley Ionian fleet, the city of tents that lined the banks, and of the thousands of horsemen and infantry flying their banners. In addition to the armored soldiers, many spectators came out to witness the arrival of the great king and his awesome army.

Darius set up his army on the high banks of the Bosporus and assessed the situation. His examination of the bridge of boats pleased him greatly, and he rewarded Mandrocles with money and honors. In a humble and selfless display of devotion to his king, Mandrocles used the money to commission an artist to build a statue that would praise Darius for the building of the bridge. This pleased Darius to no end, and he lavished Mandrocles with even more rewards. He also admired the sculpture and rewarded the artist handsomely.

Darius spent some time exploring the area, traveling to a series of small islands in the Bosporus. He continued the inspection of the bridge during its final phases of construction. As he completed his preparations for the journey up the Danube River, he decided to place yet another monument. This would be constructed on the site from which he would depart the shores. The monument was comprised of two towers made of white marble. The inscriptions on this monument commemorate Darius as the leader of the expedition. They also pay tribute to the countries that contributed to the endeavor, detailing the numbers of troops or ships they provided. The inscriptions were made on each of two columns: one in Assyrian and the other in Greek. By communicating in these languages, Darius intended both Persia and Europe to recognize what he was sure would prove an accomplishment.

Finally, it came time to depart. The ships entered the Danube River and sailed for two days. They landed and dispensed troops to defend the ships, which they arranged across the river to make a bridge. Darius, in turn, led his army across Thrace to the banks of the Danube, where they met the Ionian fleet. The army crossed the bridge and stepped onto Scythia.

At first, Darius ordered the bridge of boats to be broken up. He reasoned that the men required to defend the bridge would be put to better use fighting on the front line. But one of his generals advised him that the bridge might be put to good use upon their return. In the meantime, it could enhance communication with the countries behind them. Darius thought this wise and changed his orders accordingly. He planned to maintain the bridge for two months. He told Histiaeus, whom he had entrusted as the commander of the galleys, that if he did not return within two months time they were free to abandon their posts and sail the galleys back to their Ionian homeland. To this end, he took a length of rope and tied 60 knots in it, one for each day of the two-month period. He instructed them to untie one knot each day. When the rope had no knots, they were free to go.

ENGAGEMENT

When the Scythians first heard of Darius's advances, they summoned messengers to reach the various tribes. The message was a call to arms. The vast majority of tribes formed an alliance against Darius's army. It is important to note that the tribes that inhabited Scythia had no cities that they would feel a strong compulsion to defend. Instead, they were wanderers who had no homes. It was questionable that Darius would be able to even locate the enemy.

Because their few small towns and villages were not worth defending, the Scythians employed what in later times is called

a "scorched earth" policy. As Darius's army advanced, they retreated, destroying anything that the invaders might use as supplies. This would include such things as weapons and tools as well as food supplies, livestock, and crops. The Scythian generals were shrewd. They had horsemen harass Darius's troops every step of the way, so that they were forced to remain alert. In time, it appeared that the army was pursuing them, so they began to lead Darius's army through the territories that had refused to lend support to the Scythian cause. Thus, they drew their unwilling neighbors, who were forced to defend themselves, into the battle.

Darius found these tactics frustrating to say the least. Eventually, he had had enough. He decided to call the Scythians out to battle in the open. He sent spokesmen to Indathyrsus, the Scythian chief, to deliver a message. The message accused the chief of delaying the inevitable. It demanded the Scythians either engage in battle or concede defeat to the greater power.

Indathyrsus responded with a defiant message. He said that the Persian army was powerless to do harm to the Scythians. They had no cities the army could seize or plunder, so they were free to roam as they pleased. There was only one area the Persians should avoid: the grave of their ancestors. If the Persians were to tread upon this land, they could certainly expect a battle:

> There is nothing new or strange in what we do. We follow our mode of life in peaceful times. We have neither towns nor cultivated lands in these parts which might induce us, through fear of their being ravaged, to be in any hurry to fight you. But if you must needs come to blows with us speedily, look about you, and behold our fathers' tombs. Attempt to meddle with them and you shall see whether or not we will fight with you.

In his attempt to invade Scythia, Darius underestimated the abilities and organization of the wandering tribes that inhabited the country. Viewed as barbarians who were merely useful in battle, the Scythians outsmarted Darius's forces by using psychology and their knowledge of the landscape. A detail from a fourth centry B.C. plaque (*above*) depicts a mounted Scythe.

The Scythians then demonstrated their control of the situation with the following tactic: they sent a detachment down the Danube River to take the bridge. Upon encountering the

Ionians guarding the bridge, the detachment learned the Ionians would abandon the site after the two-month period. They made an agreement with the Ionians to leave them alone until the two months had passed. They sent word back to the main body of forces, who ceased their harassment of Darius's rear flank. After all, the minor attacks were meant to discourage the army and hasten their retreat. Now the Scythians wanted to buy time so they could seize the bridge when Darius's guards abandoned it, as instructed. They also drove a large herd of cattle into the path of the Persian army so it would be well supplied with food. This would ensure the Persians would have no reason to retreat.

THE GIFT AND THE HARE

At this time a Scythian messenger arrived at the invaders' camp bearing gifts. These were a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The Persians puzzled over the meaning of these gifts, some believing it was a sign of the Scythians' readiness to lay down their arms. Others thought the gift signified threats. While the Persians studied this problem, the Scythians made their next move. They gathered their forces and lined them up in loose groups, as if in preparation for battle.

All of a sudden, the Scythian troops were observed to erupt in disorganization. Many abandoned their ranks. A small group of men began running about the plain haphazardly, shouting and laughing. Darius demanded to know the meaning of this custom. He sent messengers out to find out what the tumult was all about. They reported that the Scythians were hunting a hare that had burst out of a thicket. Darius was insulted that on the eve of a battle the enemy could forget the danger of his own imposing forces in order to chase, of all things, a rabbit.

That night Darius consulted his generals. They agreed the Scythians were confident and strong and that they might very well lose the battle. They then agreed that it would be in their

best interest to forgo the conquest of Scythia and return to Persia. Fearing his reputation as a great military leader would be tarnished, Darius insisted the retreat be secret.

He ordered men to light large campfires. He then separated the sick and wounded troops from the healthy troops and ordered them to stand guard while the healthy troops completed a mission. Late that night, he led the healthy troops out of camp, leaving the invalids to the Scythians. When the troops left in the camp finally realized they had been tricked, they sent messengers to the Scythian army, offering their surrender. The Scythians immediately turned toward the Danube River in pursuit of Darius and his men.

As the Persians, who did not know the country well, struggled toward the river, the Scythians took a shorter route. They arrived at the river first, where they encountered the Ionians. Thinking that Darius's army was headed toward a different destination, the Sycthians left, somehow missing the Persians as they arrived at the river under the dark of night. Darius led the army across the bridge, back through Thrace and across the Bosporus, before they finally arrived within the safe boundaries of the empire.

It had been a very strange war to Darius. There had been nothing to be captured and held—no cities, no buildings, no plunder, nothing but the rimless steppe. He had brought his troops all of this way to fight for empty land and sky. Darius had no alternative but to turn back. He never campaigned northward through Europe again, and the Scythians prevailed on the south Russian steppe and kept expanding westward for the next century.

CHAPTER

9

The Invasion of Greece

IT HAD LONG BEEN DARIUS'S DREAM TO EXPAND THE GREAT PERSIAN Empire to the west beyond the shores of the Aegean Sea and into Europe. Throughout his reign, he had kept an eye on the Grecian states, believing one day he would conquer them and make them part of Persia. In fact, he had sent a small scouting party to travel through the cities of Greece to gather information for a future invasion. This party was able to move from state to state, essentially as tourists, in order to get a feel for the terrain, the defenses, and in general for the Grecian way of life.

But Darius's plans to conquer Greece were waylaid by his attempt to conquer Scythia to the north. Historians believe this decision was influenced in part by the reports delivered by the scouts. Darius believed the Greek states would be more

easily influenced to surrender if he controlled Scythia. It is also thought that he looked upon the invasion of Scythia as a tune-up for what he surmised would be a more difficult war with Greece. As we know, his attempt to take Scythia was ill fated, and he returned to Persia with his tail between his legs. However, this defeat did not affect his plans for invading the lands to the west of the Aegean. With the arrogance typical of the king of one of the world's greatest powers, he viewed his army's defeat at the hands of Scythians as a strategic, voluntary retreat rather than as an outright loss. He also reasoned that it was no doubt a rare occurrence when a small, primitive army like that of the Scythians could turn aside a superior army of well-trained troops such as the Persian army. With these thoughts, he continued to plan for an invasion of Greece.

THE GREEK STATES

The people who lived in the various Greek states were largely a different breed than those who occupied the Iranian plateau. They can be thought of as having a higher character or of being more civilized in character than the Persians. As a whole, their primary interests at the time lay in developing foundational governments and societies of thriving, healthy individuals. Cyrus had already conquered the Greek states that lay on the east side of the Aegean Sea, and those were part of the Persian Empire. Darius was confident that he could lead his army across the sea and be victorious in taking command of those states on the western side of the Aegean.

The Greek states had no central government. Each functioned as its own independent entity, with its own government and law. The ambitions of democracy were often pitted against the harsh reality of monarchism, in which dominant individuals would rise to power. There was often fighting within a state, but there were also conflicts between states. Darius saw the lack of central power, as well as the conflicts among and between states, as an advantage.

Other rulers feared Darius's reach and power. The king of Macedonia, Amyntas (*above*), was cautious and wary about angering his Persian counterpart. He knew Darius wanted control of Thrace, and he allowed seven Persian diplomats to feast and stay at his palace. Later, he was horrified to find that his son had conspired to kill all seven of these men.

Upon his retreat from Scythia, Darius was thinking ahead to an encounter with Greece when he left a large force of troops at Thrace, where they set up a stronghold. Darius charged his famed general Megabyzus with command of the stronghold. It was his responsibility to attempt, with whatever means necessary, the acquisition of small Greek territories, if possible without force.

Most of Megabyzus's attempts to reason with the Greeks were unsuccessful, such as the time he sent seven diplomats to Thrace with the orders to submit to an alliance, the catch being that Thrace would surrender authority to the Persians. The king, whose name was Amyntas, admitted the diplomats and lavished them with a feast, during which the diplomats drank great quantities of wine. Under the influence of the wine, the Persians took a great interest in the ladies of the court. When the king's son sensed a vulnerability in the Persians, he took advantage, sending the women away and promising their return. Meanwhile, he ordered young men to don the women's costumes, concealing daggers beneath their loose clothing. When the young men returned to the party, they saw that the Persians were too overcome by wine to notice that they were, in fact, men. They killed the Persians, much to the horror of Amyntas, who feared the wrath of Darius.

Under typical circumstances, such an act would have attracted a measured show of force from an empire as great as Persia. But at just about that time, revolt broke out in the empire. Darius had to put his plans for conquering Greece on hold.

THE IONIAN REVOLT

While Megabyzus badgered the Greeks, there were stirrings elsewhere within the Greek states. Ironically, it began with one of Darius's most faithful supporters—Histiaeus, the Ionian chieftan Darius had charged with guarding the boats at the Danube during his invasion of Scythia. Histiaeus was the one who kept

his men around, even past the two months Darius had asked them to wait. When Darius had fled to the Danube River with the Scythian army hot on his tail, he was relieved to find the bridge intact. One could only wonder what horrors he and his men would have met had they been unable to cross the river.

Darius wished to reward Histiaeus, and at the latter's request he granted him a territory between Thrace and Macedonia, on the west side of the Aegean Sea. But in his haste to bestow favors upon the man, Darius had not considered that he had already placed Megabyzus in command of the territory. Plus, Megabyzus was Persian, and Histiaeus was Greek, creating the potential for a conflict between the two, should tensions arise.

Histiaeus built a city at the mouth of the Strymon River. When Megabyzus found out about the city, he warned Darius of the danger of allowing a Greek to establish a stronghold at such a strategic location. He told Darius that Histiaeus would revolt and join the Greek states to oppose the Persian king. This gave Darius great pause, and it was not long before he came to see Megabyzus's point. He removed Histiaeus from his post and, in the disguise of a reward, installed him in an even higher position in the city of Susa.

Histiaeus was not happy with his new position or with his king, and he began to make a plan. He decided to convince a particular Ionian chief, named Aristagoras, to revolt. Aristagoras, who ruled over the city of Miletus, was fiercely independent. Some sources say he was the son-in-law of Histiaeus. Histiaeus had no doubt he could incite the tyrant to rebel. He would then convince Darius that he, Histiaeus, was the best man to send to suppress the rebellion. Once he was in Asia Minor, he would join the rebellion in defiance of Darius.

Histiaeus's plan worked to perfection, and it was not long before Aristagoras had unified a number of Ionian states in rebellion. Fleets from Athens and Eretes sailed to Ephesus, where they landed and marched into Sardis. They plundered Sardis and burned it to the ground. The revolt then spread to

Greek cities in Cyprus and around the Hellespont Strait. The revolt gained momentum, and for a while it looked like the Greek states would achieve a permanent freedom from Persian

Histiaeus's Messenger

One interesting story of the Persian defeat in Greece involved the tyrant Histiaeus. Histiaeus, an Ionian chieftain, led part of the Persian force that engaged the Scythians; he had been left in charge of guarding the bridge of triremes, which were left intact as a point of retreat and as a supply line. As a reward, Darius granted Histiaeus a settlement at the mouth of the Strymon River, a strategic location envied by the Persian commander Megabyzus, who suspected the man's loyalty. Heeding the warning of his trusted commander, Darius relocated Histiaeus, who, in order to regain control of his settlement, started a revolt in Ionia.

In order to launch the revolt, he had to get a secret message to his ally, Aristagoras. His innovative method of conveying the message is the stuff of legend. First, he summoned his most trusted slave, whom he insisted was ill. As the preferred treatment, he had the slave's head shaved. He then ordered the scarification of the slave's bare head as therapy. The scars were made with a sharp stick, dipped in a colored dye. In essence, it was a permanent tattoo. Histiaeus' genius was that while pretending his slave was getting medical treatment, he had the message tattooed on the head of the slave.

He then had the slave's head wrapped in bandages, so as to obscure the message, and kept him hidden away. After a period of time, the slave's hair grew back, covering the tattoo. At this point, Histiaeus sent the slave to Aristagoras with instructions to shave his head when he arrived. This was how the message was received. Aristagoras initiated the revolt. Histiaeus joined him in Ionia and though he tried valiantly, the Persians defeated the Greeks, and he failed to regain his settlement.

rule. But even the Greeks knew that eventually the Persians would send troops to return justice to the area.

The Greeks fought bravely but were no match for the superior numbers of the Persians. In 494 B.C., after six years of fighting, they met their end at the Battle of Lade, when the majority of the Athenian fleet was destroyed. The Ionian Revolt marked the beginning of the first conflict between the Persians and the Greeks, and would come to signify the beginning of the Persian wars.

THE MARCH TO WAR

Darius organized a huge, well-armed force of troops to take into battle. These consisted of infantry and cavalry. Rather than lead the troops, he installed a Persian general named Datis as commander of the entire army. As Darius had done for his march into Scythia, Datis sent scouts ahead to the territories the army would march through so these territories would offer up additional soldiers. As they approached the territories of Asia Minor, they would gain additional ground forces, as well as experienced seamen.

The march began in Susa and moved westward to Cilicia, which lay at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. There, the troops met with ships that carried them to the Aegean Sea and then to the island of Samos. There they joined a large number of troops from Ionia and the surrounding islands that lay within the Persian Empire and sailed north toward Athens. Along the way, they paused at the numerous small Grecian islands to plunder, take captives, and burn villages. This was perhaps the largest fleet ever assembled to date. The oared galleys were said to cover the water as far as they eye could see. It must have been an imposing sight. At last they reached the shores of Athens, where they disembarked.

By this time the Athenian government was well aware of the advance. They had already sent to the city of Sparta, famous

for its fierce warriors, to ask for support and protection. The Spartans had promised aid, and while the Athenians waited, they gathered their forces at the northern boundaries of the city, where they deliberated strategies. It is estimated that the Athenian forces numbered somewhere in the neighborhood of 10,000 troops. The Persians brought 100,000 troops to battle. The Athenian army was directed by three generals. Because of the overwhelming disparity in numbers, two of these generals determined their chances were best if they remained within the city of Athens to defend an attack. The third, the famous general Miltiades, thought it best to attack the Persians. Eventually, he was able to convince his cocommanders that his strategy could be effective. They agreed on the condition that he lead the Greek army into battle.

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

Miltiades had led his army outside of the city limits to the plain of Marathon, which lay between the mountain of Marathon and the Aegean Sea. The Persian army was camped about a mile away. From their positions, each army could clearly see the other. The Persians were spread out across a large portion of the plain. Their tents extended into the distance. Their infantry waited at the ready. Their horse-mounted cavalry rode back and forth across the front line. In contrast, the Athenians huddled, without horses or archers. In fact, they had few weapons of any effect.

The Greeks surmised that due to its massive numbers, the Persian army would be slow in moving and in carrying out orders. They determined their only chance at victory was to be had by sudden, brief attacks of heightened ferocity. The Persian masses began to move slowly toward them, and when they saw the tiny Greek army they were overwhelmed by confidence. They even carried with them blocks of marble with which they planned to construct a monument to their victory, once the battle had concluded.

The Persians were so confident, they could not be ready for what was to happen next. Just as soon as the Greeks began their casual advance, they broke into a sprint directly toward the Persians. This caught the Persians off guard, and before they knew it they were in full hand-to-hand combat. The Greeks were ferocious in their fighting, cutting up the Persians with swords until, after several hours, they fell out of rank and began to flee in every direction. Some fled to the mountains, but most tried desperately to make their way back to the safety of the galleys. Large numbers of Persians were slaughtered. Those that escaped by ship left their wounded and dying to the Greeks, who also scored nearly all of the Persians' stores of weapons, food, and goods. They took the marble blocks the Persians had carried and built their own monument, and they buried their dead in a massive grave on the plain, heaping loads of earth onto it. All told, 6,000 Persians had been killed; only 200 Greeks had paid the ultimate individual price of warfare.

The Battle of Marathon was one of the turning points of ancient Greek and Persian history, and it was an inspiration to all peoples who were made aware of it. It marked the triumph of a small nation over an empire and the beginnings of a cultural revolution within the Greek states. In his book *Darius the Great*, Jacob Abbot writes: "The battle of Marathon was one of those great events in the history of the human race which continue to attract from age to age, the admiration of mankind. They who look upon war, in all its forms, as only the perpetration of unnatural and atrocious crime, which rises to dignity and grandeur only by the very enormity of its guilt, cannot but respect the courage, the energy, and the cool and determined resolution with which the little band of Greeks went forth to stop the torrent of foes which all the nations of a whole continent had combined to pour upon them."

Perhaps most importantly, had the Athenians lost this battle, the Persians would have installed a Persian government, and the Persian culture would have taken hold in Greece long

The marble blocks carried by the Persians to build their victory memorial were left behind when the Greeks defeated them and built their own monument to the fallen Athenian heroes. The Athenian mound, shown in the background, covers the remains of the battle's fallen warriors.

before the classical period in Greek history. So, all of culture that was influenced by the Greeks would have been Persian culture instead.

Having expected to win an easy victory for the empire, the Persian army had been bloodied, and they had no stomach for more fighting. As it were, Datis and the large number of survivors boarded their ships and returned home the way they had

come. Datis did not have the stomach to return to Darius with news of a defeat after expectations for victory were so high. Though he had captured many prisoners and had commandeered a good deal of goods in his conquering of the Greek islands along the way, he feared the wrath of the king. Yet he realized a full retreat was the only viable option.

When Datis reached Darius, the king welcomed him with kindness. He forgave his general for the defeat, and it is said that he did not punish the prisoners. True to his character as a determined optimist, he was not discouraged by the defeat at the hands of the Greeks. It only strengthened his resolve to conquer the Greek states and expand his empire into the heart of Europe. He took it as a personal insult that the Greeks, whom he had expected would surrender without battle, would defy his rule. He vowed to amass a force of troops much greater than the 100,000 he had sent to Athens, and return to defeat whatever armies the Greeks could assemble. He planned to lead his army into battle himself. With the grand dream of conquering Greece in his mind, Darius sent orders to all territories within the empire to gather as many men and horses as were available.

CHAPTER

10

The Legacy of Darius

AT SOME POINT DURING THE SEVERAL YEARS IT TOOK TO MAKE PREPARA-tions for the next invasion of Athens, Darius decided to name a successor to the throne. At the time, Persian law dictated that a king was required to name a successor before he ventured off to risk his life in a foreign war. Darius had several sons, and he feared if more than one claimed the throne the land would be thrown into civil war. The oldest son, Artobazanes, was born of a wife Darius had before he became king. The second son, named Xerxes, was born to Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great, after Darius became king. For these reasons, and especially because Xerxes was a descendent of Cyrus, Darius named Xerxes the successor.

A NEW KING

Darius continued the preparations for the invasion. Because the war effort was of such immense magnitude, it was necessary to raise taxes in order to cover the costs of raising troops, procuring horses, and manufacturing weapons. The new taxes were not embraced by the whole of the Persian Empire. In particular, the Egyptians were upset they would have to pay the king a greater tribute. Desperate for change, they organized a revolt. Darius would have to turn his efforts toward the suppression of the revolt, which would delay his preparations for the war in Greece. But before he could subdue the Egyptians, he suddenly fell ill.

As was the custom of all great kings of ancient times, Darius had begun the construction of his own tomb some time before he began to advance in age. The tomb was situated at the north end of the plain, near Persepolis. It lay at the base of a cliff. The tomb face was decorated with reliefs and an inscription. The inscription read: "If now you shall think, 'How many are of those lands which Darius has seized?' then look at the representations of those who bear the throne. Then you shall know, then shall it be known to you: The spear of a Persian man has gone forth afar; then shall it be known to you: A Persian man has smitten a foe far from Parsa."

The tomb was adorned with those very representations of the peoples who made up the Persian empire under the reign of Darius: the Persian, the Mede, the Elamite, the Parthian, the Scythian, the Babylonian, the Assyrian, and the man of Maka. The tomb also included reliefs of Darius, standing with his bow, and of Ahuramazda.

Soon after he became ill, Darius died. It was November, 486 B.C. He was 64 years old. He left to his son the most powerful empire in the world, a wealthy kingdom with secure borders, a thriving government and system of laws, a steady economy,

and a growing culture born from the assimilation of the various peoples of the Iranian plateau.

XERXES

Immediately following the death of his father, Xerxes used money from the royal treasury to commission a tablet in order to commemorate his ascension to the throne. This inscription included the following text, which points out that Xerxes had been chosen king over his brother and acknowledges his own faith in the god of Zoroaster: "Darius also had other sons, but by the will of Ahuramazda, Darius my father made me the greatest after himself. When Darius my father passed away, by the will of Ahuramazda I became king on my father's throne."

The Greeks recall Xerxes as a weakling leader, whose decisions were influenced largely by his court. They point to his single military defeat, which, significant though it was, came beside many victories. The historians of the Orient paint a different picture. They point out that before he became king, Xerxes had spent 12 years training for the throne as an administrator in Babylon. They also credit Xerxes with a slew of accomplishments that contributed to the refinement of Darius's Persia. These refinements were seen in the development of law, culture, and art. But Xerxes was also an accomplished military leader. Under his direction, a portion of the mighty army Darius was assembling for the invasion of Greece was able to quell the revolts in Egypt and Babylon, the two wealthiest areas in the world at that time.

Xerxes' first priority was to finish the palace at Persepolis that Darius had begun. His second priority was to march the Persian army to Athens and to conquer Greece, as his father had ordered. The army consisted of several groups. The core was formed by the Persians. These were led by the 10,000 Immortals, the official royal bodyguard. This was an intimidating force

Darius's tomb was built to represent his view of the empire and the world. Carvings of notable citizens from all over the Persian Empire were depicted on the tomb's walls, along with representations of Darius and the god Ahuramazda.

for any enemy. They were joined by the ranked Persian infantry and the various contingents from each satrapy. Egypt furnished sailors for the voyage. Ships were furnished by the Phoenicians,

Egyptians, and the Greeks who were under Persian rule. In total, the Persian fleet numbered 1,200 ships. In terms of numbers and magnitude, this was the largest military undertaking ever attempted. Xerxes was sure he would succeed in the conquest of the Greek states and honor his father as well as the god Ahuramazda. Then he could return to his real interests—art and architecture.

ONWARD TO BATTLE

Xerxes used the lessons learned in Datis's failure in Greece to inform his plans. A direct attack on Athens with a large army had not worked in the past. He instead chose a strategy whereby the royal fleet would support the gradual advance of troops. Preparations were made, such as the construction of a canal for the safe harboring of ships. Food and supplies for the army were placed at strategic points along the journey, particularly in Thrace.

As the Persians approached, the Greeks sounded the alarm. The various states sent gathered delegates to discuss an alliance. To the shock of the western Greek states who would fight to retain their independence, their neighbors were unenthusiastic about taking on the great army of Persia. However, Sparta, who had been late in supporting the other Greek states during the battle at Marathon, showed up promptly to defend the Greek way of life. They believed the Persians would try to get to Athens. So the Spartan king, Leonidas, set up a defense at a mountain pass called Thermopylae. There, they waited for the Persian advance.

When the Persian army approached the pass, they realized it was wide enough only for two or three people to go through. Xerxes figured his army could overwhelm the Spartans by sheer numbers alone, so he ordered his troops to attack the pass. Again and again the Spartans turned the Persians back. The Persians suffered great losses. Just when it seemed they had hit

a dead end, a Greek traitor informed them of another way to reach the mountains. They were able to ambush the Spartans from the rear, killing all of them, including King Leonidas.

The Persians made their way down the Attic Peninsula and finally to Athens. Once there, they found that the city had been abandoned. Xerxes ordered the city burned to the ground. Great sections of the city were ruined, but the great Acropolis survived the destruction. Xerxes then ordered a

The Immortals

Although the Persian army was known for its masses of infantrymen and bowmen, whose rain of arrows was said to blot out the sun, it was feared for its special forces. These forces, called the Immortals, were the Imperial Guard and the core of the Persian army. The Immortals were named thus because their number was never permitted to fall below 10,000. If an Immortal was killed, fell sick, or retired from service, another highly trained fighter stood ready to replace him. As elite soldiers, they were permitted special privileges, such as bringing concubines and servants on wagons with them into marches. Special food was brought to feed the Immortals.

Their uniforms were as intimidating as their numbers. They wore brilliant, gold-decked armor, a single gold earring, and many golden bracelets. They were cloaked in long robes that reached to their wrists and ankles, leaving very little flesh exposed. Each Immortal carried a special spear with a handle made of cornel wood and adorned with a silver pomegranate. Each carried a bow over his left arm and a quiver of arrows on his left shoulder.

The Immortals are commemorated in the reliefs carved into the columns at Persepolis. Their presence was legendary. So feared were they, enemies often surrendered at first sight of them.

throne be set up so he could watch the battle between the Persian and Athenian fleets that would soon take place in the Bay of Salamis.

Though the Persian navy had far more ships than the Greek navy, the Greek ships were faster and more maneuverable than the larger Persian ships. But the Persians made the first move and sealed off any escape the Greeks may have had. In effect, they surrounded the Greeks. It would have made great sense for Xerxes to have his navy stay put. Surrounded, the Greeks had no way to get supplies and would have been starved into surrender in a matter of days. But Xerxes was hungry for a spectacular victory, and he pressed his navy to continue to fight rather than to simply establish a blockade. The Greeks held their ground, inflicting great damage to the Persian fleet, which retreated. Some 300 Persian ships were lost, and many Persian sailors drowned.

Xerxes had built a bridge of boats across the Hellespont, and now he feared that the Greek navy would sail north and cut off his line of communication and supplies from Persia. So, leaving a large number of forces in Greece, he retreated to Sardis to keep an eye on the Ionians and to regroup for another strike.

One year later, the Greeks had built up enough courage to attack the Persian forces that had remained in Greece. They made their way across the Peninsula of Attica and found the Persians camped on the Asopus. Once again, the Persians had the Greeks backed up to a wall. But once again, they had underestimated the grit and resolve of their foe. The Greeks held off the Persians, who eventually retreated.

This was the second instance within the year that the Persians ignored the certain benefits of diplomacy in lieu of decisive victories that never came. To this point, they had lost only one of their three armies, but they would soon lose a second, and they would finally retreat to Persia. But if Xerxes had been

more patient and had extended his battles over a longer period of time, the Greeks surely would have been forced to surrender, and he could have expanded the Persian Empire into Europe. But this was not the case, and he was not able to fulfill Darius's quest.

THE DECLINE OF THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

Xerxes was the last great Persian king. Subsequent rulers did not have his success in refining the cultural qualities Darius had founded. But the primary reason for decline was the very model of government and economics that Darius had created. Over a period of years, various satrapies gained individual power and were able to negotiate with or even resist the central power of the king. Thus, Babylonia and Egypt were powers unto themselves, though they remained part of the Persian Empire.

As the economy slowly declined, so did the empire's military might. As the empire's borders grew more vulnerable, a legendary military commander, one of the best in the history of the world, paid a visit. His name was Alexander, and he is known as Alexander the Great and Alexander of Macedon. His fearsome army took Babylon, Susa, and later Persepolis, the latter in early 330 B.C. This marked the end of Persian dominance in the region.

THE LEGACY

Unlike most famous leaders whom history has kept alive, Darius is not remembered for any single act of greatness. Instead, history remembers him as the man who became the king of the greatest empire of the time. But he didn't ride into history on the coattails of the great Persian Empire. He was truly a great governor and a shrewd leader.

Before becoming king, Darius's son Xerxes (*above*) served as an administrator during his father's reign and was said to have contributed greatly to the development of law, culture, and art in the Persian Empire. However, Xerxes's haste in attacking Greece destroyed any chance of achieving Darius's dream of expanding Persia into Europe.

He extended the Persian Empire to its farthest reaches, reestablishing the borders drawn in the times of his predecessor, Cyrus the Great. He suppressed a widespread revolt upon taking the throne, and made several attempts to expand the empire during his reign. But what he will be remembered for

most is the innovative ways he managed the empire. No ancient civilization prior to the Persian Empire under his rule saw such widespread organization and governance.

Darius's innovative organization of the empire into satrapies was, at the time, unique. His creation and management of distinct states, each with its own inner government and sense of independence, is the basis of our federal system. Darius ruled some 50 million people in a well-organized nation tied together by the system of roads he commissioned for the purposes of both travel and speedy communication. It was the largest empire the world had ever seen.

Darius managed the empire by reforming existing laws so that expectations of all the empire's citizens were consistent and documented. He increased the numbers of scribes who created administrative records in a number of important arenas, including government, law, and commerce. He also created a new-at-the-time system of taxation through fixed tributes. This led to a more consistent and predictable income to the royal treasury. Finally, he introduced a practical system of weights and measures, as well as coinage, to ensure fairness in trade.

He is remembered as a fair leader who allowed his subjects freedom of religion, and like many Persian kings he was a loyal practitioner of what we now call human rights. This was evidenced in his insistence that all workers and slaves participating in the work of the state be paid, and in the open networks of communication between the judges throughout Persia.

Finally, we know through the Greek historian Herodotus that Darius helped build the empire that would serve as an inspiration for the Greeks, who would later achieve dominance in the region and borrow many of his ideas to create the elements of democracy heralded by the Western world.

CHRONOLOGY

521 B.C. Cambyses dies and is succeeded by the false Smerdis. Smerdis is overthrown, and Darius I takes the throne. Reorganization of the Persian Empire and administration.

520 B.C. Darius begins a campaign against the Scythians. Darius commissions the completion of the canal joining the Nile to the Red Sea.

519 B.C. Darius commissions the Behistun Inscription to be constructed on the Ecbatana/Babylon Road, to give an account of his early successes. The cuneiform inscriptions in three languages lead Sir Henry Rawlinson to decipher cuneiform writing. Darius puts down a second revolt in Babylon.

515 B.C. Darius completes the canal from the Nile to the Red Sea. Darius sends Scylax, a Carian, on a voyage of discovery into the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. He establishes a sea route between India and Persia.

512 B.C. Darius leads a campaign into Scythia by building a bridge of boats across the Bosporus River.

501 B.C. Megabates, with a Persian naval fleet of 200 triremes, attacks Naxos with the support of the Ionians under Aristagoras.

500 B.C. Darius completes or expands the Royal Road.

499 B.C. The Ionian Revolt. The Greek cities of the Ionian Coast under the leadership of Aristagoras revolt against the Persians.

496 B.C. Darius recaptures Cyprus with the help of the Phoenician navy.

493 B.C. Ionian revolt ends when Miletus is sacked by Persians.

492 B.C. Mardonius leads a naval expedition against Greece. The Persian fleet is destroyed by a storm while trying to round Mount Athos.

490 B.C. Persians are defeated at the Battle of Marathon by an Athenian army led by Miltiades.

486 B.C. The death of Darius I.

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